

POSTCOLONIALISM AND RELIGIONS



# CASTE, GENDER, AND CHRISTIANITY IN COLONIAL INDIA

*TELUGU WOMEN IN MISSION*

James Elisha Taneti



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## Postcolonialism and Religions

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James Elisha Taneti

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CHRISTIANITY IN COLONIAL  
INDIA

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*James Elisha Taneti*

palgrave  
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CASTE, GENDER, AND CHRISTIANITY IN COLONIAL INDIA

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*In honor of my parents  
Rajamani  
and  
Eliah*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	American Bible Society
BFBS	British and Foreign Bible Society
CEZMS	Church of England Zenana Missionary Society
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CSMBTS	Charlotte Swanson Memorial Bible Training School
ERYBTS	Eva Rose York Bible Training School
INC	Indian National Congress
LBDFM	London Bible and Domestic Female Mission
LMS	London Missionary Society
RCA	Reformed Church of America
RTS	Religious Tract Society

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## GLOSSARY

<b>Agraharam.</b>	The space in village where the “highest” of the castes, Brahmins, lived. Physically they live at a higher altitude.
<b>Agravarna.</b>	The word literally means higher category or higher color. The top three categories in the Hindu social order, that is, Brahmins, Ksatriyas, and Vaishyas, are considered agravarnas.
<b>Amma.</b>	A polite way of addressing a woman. It literally means mother.
<b>Beebi.</b>	Another respectful way of addressing a woman. A Hindi word for older sister.
<b>Bhakti.</b>	One of the four paths or disciplines with which an individual is believed to attain liberation or <i>moksha</i> .
<b>Bodhakaralu.</b>	Female preacher.
<b>Bottu.</b>	The traditional mark on the forehead of Hindu women.
<b>Brahmin.</b>	An individual born in the priestly class, considered highest in the Hindu social hierarchy.
<b>Brahmo Samaj.</b>	A Hindu reform movement established by Ram Mohan Roy in the early nineteenth century.
<b>Dalit.</b>	An ethnic group born outside the four-tiered Hindu society and therefore considered “untouchable.”
<b>Dasari.</b>	A caste community among the Telugus.
<b>Dekkali.</b>	A Dalit subgroup in Andhra whose traditional occupation was to narrate the history of the Dalit communities.
<b>Durgah.</b>	A Muslim shrine usually built on a tomb of a saint.

**Harijan.** A term that Gandhi coined and the Indian National Congress used to refer to Dalits. Most Dalits find it derogatory.

**Lingayit.** A Saiva tradition founded by Basava of the twelfth century. Although its roots are from Karnataka, it has followers among the Telugus in the Rayalaseema region.

**Kamma.** A Sudhra subcaste in South India. As landowning groups, Kammas are very influential in Andhra Pradesh.

**Komati.** One of the Vaisya subgroups. Traditionally, they have been engaged in mercantile activities.

**Ksatriya.** The second of the four *varnas* or social categories in the Hindu social order. They are assigned the power of maintaining law and order in the society. They are warriors and rulers.

**Madiga.** A Dalit subgroup in South India. Their traditional occupations were leather-related. They made shoes and played drums in ritual processions.

**Mala.** A Dalit social group found mostly in Andhra Pradesh. Traditionally they have been landless agricultural workers.

**Manyano.** Women's groups in the Transvaal region of South Africa.

**Munshi.** A language teacher; usually a Brahmin.

**Mwali.** An ethnic group located in Zimbabwe.

**Nadar.** A social group in Tamilnadu and Kerala. As a landowning class, they are a dominant community, especially in the Tamil society.

**Naidu.** A landowning Sudhra subgroup in South India.

**Niyogi.** A Brahmin subgroup engaged in village administration as administrators and attorneys.

**Nizam.** The title for the principle ruler in the state of Hyderabad.

**Palle.** A village.

**Panthulamma.** A woman teacher.

<b>Peta.</b>	A neighborhood.
<b>Pial.</b>	A school system where classes were held on the verandah of a tutor.
<b>Polimera.</b>	Village boundaries.
<b>Prabandha.</b>	A collection of songs in praise of a deity in the Hindu tradition.
<b>Puranas.</b>	A collection of ancient lore with stories that relate worldview and the duties of Hindus.
<b>Rajayogi.</b>	A title for preachers in the messianic movement led by Pothuluri Veerabrahmam.
<b>Reddy.</b>	A landowning Sudhra subcaste in South India.
<b>Shaivite.</b>	A tradition within Hinduism, numerically second only to <b>Vaisnavism</b> . Within it, Siva is considered the supreme deity.
<b>Sangh.</b>	A group or congregation.
<b>Sankeertana.</b>	A genre of music composed in honor of a deity in the Bhakti tradition.
<b>Sanyasin.</b>	A Hindu monk.
<b>Saree.</b>	A length of unstitched cloth worn by women in India.
<b>Savara.</b>	An indigenous community in Andhra Pradesh, located mostly in the hill regions.
<b>Sepoy.</b>	A soldier.
<b>Shavakar.</b>	A trading community within the Hindu society.
<b>Suddhi.</b>	A rite of purification prescribed for a defiled Hindu. This is also used to welcome a convert to the Hindu fold.
<b>Sudhra.</b>	The fourth or the least of the four varnas or social categories in the Hindu social order. Traditionally, a Sudhra engaged in skilled work, menial labor, or servitude. Some of its subgroups are powerful in contemporary Andhra Pradesh due to their land ownership.
<b>Tamil.</b>	An ancient linguistic group in the southern most regions of India.
<b>Telugu.</b>	A linguistic group in South India

<b>Vaisya.</b>	The third of the four varnas or social categories in the Hindu social hierarchy. Traditionally, they have been traders or merchants.
<b>Varnashrama dharma.</b>	A Hindu social mechanism that divided society into different categories, assigning various occupations and allotting ranking to each.
<b>Veedhi.</b>	A Telugu name for street or lane.
<b>Velama.</b>	A landowning Sudhra subgroup in Andhra Pradesh.
<b>Waada.</b>	A caste neighborhood.

## INTRODUCTION

### DEPLOYING RELIGIOUS RESOURCES

The Telugu proverb—if available at hand, monkeys use coconuts as weapons—is meant to denigrate the wisdom of the weak, but there is a kernel of truth in it. As children growing up in South India, we chased monkeys when they visited our yard. We pelted them with stones, finding pleasure when they raced for safety. Our parents warned us that the monkeys might seek revenge against our surliness using coconuts as their missiles. As anticipated, our invading visitors plucked coconuts, or any fruits on our trees, and deployed them as weapons against us. The weak skillfully use available resources to equalize the powers of the dominant in social struggles as well. Relegated to the fringes, the vulnerable groups in the Indian subcontinent, such as women and Dalits,<sup>1</sup> turned hostile political conditions and even natural calamities to their advantage to garner bargaining power.

Deploying cultural resources and religious institutions of the dominant, both the indigenous and imported, has been one of the strategies of social resistance in South Asia. Social conflict might not have been the only birthing factor, but it certainly contributed to the origins of religious traditions such as Buddhism and Sikhism. In their attempt to maintain a distinct identity, Dalit communities nurtured nature (primal) spiritualities and sought to exert religious authority as priests and musicians even among the high-ranking caste communities with whom they normally had little, or forbidden, contact. Identifying caste system as a Hindu practice, many Dalits converted to non-Hindu religions, such as Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity, in order to escape the traditional caste restrictions. Incorporating useful resources from Hindu worldviews, some Dalits collaborated with other subaltern groups and developed eclectic movements that

promised better social status. The Rajayogi movement was one such movement.<sup>2</sup> Hoping to climb the social hierarchy, a few Dalits, on the other hand, embraced Hindu identity and emulated the practices of the dominant, a strategy that sociologist M. N. Srinivas called the process of sanskritization.<sup>3</sup> Thus the subaltern groups, with notable success, had employed religious and cultural resources in their social struggles, just as the dominant groups legitimized their social and political control with religious rhetoric.<sup>4</sup>

Religious beliefs have also been used in South Asian women's struggles for social respect. Women played prominent roles in nature spiritualities and messianic movements as priests and prophetesses. They contributed significantly to popular expressions of Hinduism. For example, female poets such as Meera Bai of the sixteenth century from what now is known as Rajasthan shaped the Bhakti piety through her songs. Nineteenth-century women, as informal agents and professional preachers, led their families and communities in conversion movements toward Christianity. Some of these women led and served their communities as schoolteachers, nurses, and Biblewomen,<sup>5</sup> the principal subject of this book.

The colonial presence in the Indian subcontinent substantially influenced these social movements. The British colonial administration disrupted the traditional social structures through its judiciary. By opening educational and employment opportunities to the marginalized segments of the society, the British colonial administration inadvertently provided them space to renegotiate their social standing. The preaching of Christianity by Protestant missionaries and the legal protection to make religious choices under the British *Raj* muddied the cultural norms. The exposure to modernity resulted in dissent within the dominant and heightened the aspirations of the disenfranchised for reforms. Taking advantage of the cultural unrest and educational opportunities, the subjugated groups pursued their struggles against the status quo and made inroads not seen before.

This book analyzes how Telugu Biblewomen, marginalized on account of their gender and social location, marshaled religious symbols and institutions in their social struggles.<sup>6</sup> To fulfill their social and religious aspirations, these native women preachers skillfully appropriated the evangelical Christianity that Protestant missionaries introduced to them. They deftly embraced an alien religious institution imported from London. At the same time, they retained some local customs and concepts. The colonial backdrop shaped this process of subversion as did the gender and caste aspirations of these women.

The colonial environment certainly played a decisive—disruptive as well as empowering—role in the transplanting of the office of Biblewoman among the Telugus. But the historical processes in the subcontinent were not remote-controlled by the British Parliament, nor were the groups at the social fringes in the colonies absent in these movements. Social dynamics and gender roles played a decisive role in the development of this profession in the region. Indigenous worldviews and messianic movements profoundly impacted this process. Through an analysis of what these women perceived their mission to be and how they engaged in it, and an examination of its social sources and ramifications, this book demonstrates how Telugu Biblewomen appropriated an alien religious institution, using indigenous resources, and how social dynamics and political contexts contributed to this process.

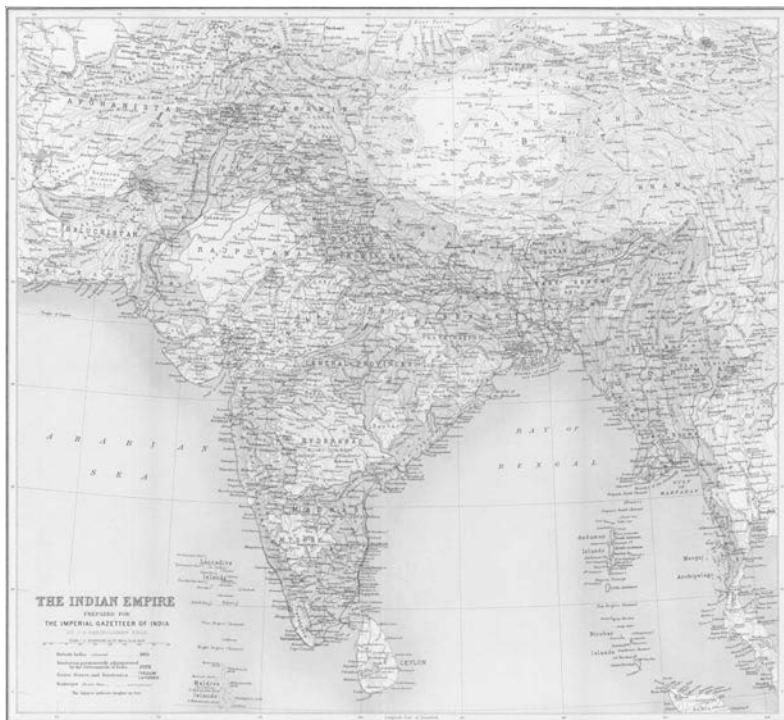
While focusing on the impact of social and political dynamics on religious beliefs, I do not imply that faith convictions are incapable of fuelling social resistance or unsettling social symmetry. Religious beliefs influence economic behavior and social relationships of individuals and groups. The Biblewomen whose theologies and practices we examine in this book became professional preachers and promoted cultural change not merely because of their social aspirations. A sense of religious obligation guided their ministerial practices. This volume underlines this dialogical relationship between religious beliefs and social dynamics.

## A CONVOLUTED CULTURAL WEB

The field of action is the coastal belt on the Bay of Bengal, which the British administrators christened as the Northern Circars. This territory was also identified as “ceded districts” in the British imperial records. The British East India Company claimed territorial control over the region after Shah Alam II, the eighteenth emperor in the Mughal dynasty, “ceded” it in 1765. The newly crowned but beleaguered emperor granted the British control over the region after his losses to the former at the battle at Buxar. The nizam of Hyderabad, who was in direct political control over the land, grudgingly conceded his rights the following year. The British East India Company, a trading agency, gradually consolidated political control, military supremacy, and market monopoly over this coastal belt, which included the present-day districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, and Guntur.

After quelling the resistance of the native troops in the Sepoy Mutiny<sup>7</sup> of 1857, the British Parliament inherited the Circars from the company. Control of the subcontinent was no longer corporate. The British collected revenues, regulated the market, introduced a penal code, and even installed a judicial system. They maintained a strong army, enforcing law and order, safeguarding their political and market interests, and aiding the local sovereigns in their rivalries.<sup>8</sup> The imposition of *pax Britannica*, by and large, was complete by the end of the nineteenth century, claimed a missionary observer.<sup>9</sup>

The political arrangement in the Northern Circars differed slightly from that of the state of Hyderabad, a centralized amalgamation of conquered territories ruled by the nizams with the help of local zamindars. Muslim princes popularly known as nizams (or



**Map 1.1** The Indian Empire.

*Source:* Map from the Imperial Gazetteer of India, new edition, held by University of Chicago library. Courtesy of the Digital South Asia Library, <http://dsal.uchicago.edu>.

administrators of the realm) ruled the state of Hyderabad, which later has been occupied by the Union of India in 1948.<sup>10</sup> The British stationed their agents in the palace and collected tributes from the nizams but could not interfere in the governance as often as they would have wished. By contrast, the Northern Circars constituted various decentralized kingdoms ruled by local princes. By fomenting rivalries, supplying military aid, and influencing succession choices in various dynasties, the British gradually and effectively curtailed the political influence of the local sovereigns. The native princes and feudal lords did not hesitate to collaborate with the colonial rulers, seeking a larger share in the booty. They opposed some imperial policies but only when their economic interests conflicted with those of the British.<sup>11</sup> But the British, by and large, could control the local administration and revenue collections with little resistance from the native kings.

The colonial presence of the British also opened up the religious market among the Telugus. With Christianity as a new option now open to them, Malas and Madigas, the largest Dalit groups in the region, began to convert to it, especially after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The British Parliament implemented a policy of religious neutrality, which allowed greater room for the activities of Christian missionaries.<sup>12</sup> Colonial officials with evangelical convictions sheltered and encouraged Protestant missionaries, whose arrivals dramatically surged after the mutiny.

The Telugus in the Northern Circars have always been a culturally diverse group, even before the arrival of Christianity. They embraced myriad worldviews and lifestyles. They followed various local expressions of Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Although they had different beliefs and customs, they shared some things in common. For example, Telugu was their lingua franca. Because of the fecundity of the land, most of them engaged in agricultural labor. The region, often known as the rice bowl of the subcontinent, was rural and agrarian. The rivers that flowed into the Bay of Bengal and large ponds watered the land, increasing its fertility. The irrigation system introduced by British engineers further enriched that fecundity. The landlords benefitted from these resources as well as from the cheap labor that the caste system legitimized.

The social mechanism of caste was not unique to the region but it had its local contours. As it did elsewhere in south Asia, the caste system stratified Telugu society, assigning different occupations and rankings to various groups. Telugus were born into their castes and individuals had little or no freedom to choose an occupation other

than the one traditionally assigned to their community. Prohibition of intercaste marriages ensured that no one blurred the caste boundaries.

Brahmins were placed at the top of the social hierarchy in the classical *varnashrama dharma* but their social influence was limited in this region. As they did elsewhere, the Brahmin subgroups engaged in ritual occupations but only to legitimize the social order. They allied with the British and served as attorneys, an occupation that sustained their social leverage. In return for this opportunity, the Brahmins often supported the power claims of feudal lords and the British *Raj* and were content to play subsidiary roles in the power structures. A series of anti-Brahminical movements and the land ownership patterns in the region might have contributed to this local contour.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, although traditionally placed at the bottom of the social pyramid, Sudhra communities, especially Kammas and Reddies, with access to land and money, dominated the social life of the community in the North Circars. With their ability to patronize priests with alms, they demanded obeisance and respect from the latter. Further, as owners of the cultivable lands, Kammas and Reddies demanded free or cheap labor from Dalits.

Dalits were denied the right to cultivate and to attend formal schools. Considered polluting and thus untouchable, they were consigned to the hamlets located usually at the edge of a village. Their labor was in demand, though. Dalits were expected to render manual labor, do scavenging, herd cattle, and produce leather-related objects useful for farming. To ensure this religiously sanctioned economic exploitation, the dominant culture demarcated the physical as well as social boundaries between the communities.

Relegated to the economic and social sidelines, Dalits evolved strategies to defy or comply with this bonded labor. These strategies included feigning sickness, performing below their abilities, and pilfering the harvest. At the popular level, they evolved rituals and customs with subversive space, which the caste groups assimilated into their everyday life.

Colonial environment disturbed this social balance. The social flux engineered by the British colonizers offered Dalits a few opportunities in the functioning of a village as watchmen, messengers, and hangmen, and thus relief from bonded labor.

As Uma Chakravarti rightly argues, caste and gender discriminations are symbiotically connected and one cannot exist without the other.<sup>14</sup> While the farmer controlled modes of production, endogamy regulated reproductive activities.<sup>15</sup> The socially dominant segments

sought to cement their fences by controlling the sexual behavior of their women.

Therefore, the higher the caste in the hierarchy, the more stringent the restrictions on its women were. The women at the bottom of the social ladder, on the other hand, had greater freedom, as their sexual interactions seldom altered their status or the caste system. The dominant used sacred texts and religious symbols in order to ritualize and regulate female sexuality.

Since caste is inherited at birth, women had the power to sabotage the system through association with men of “lower” castes. The traditional restrictions on widows and singles within the caste communities safeguarded the boundaries between communities and preserved the power symmetry. Telugu society required women to be the custodians of the very worldview that legitimized their subordination to men. Women were expected to provide continuity to the community by producing heirs and transmitting its cultural norms and customs. The duty of handing on the worldview to future generations brought with it occasional opportunities to subvert the same. The dominant checkmated these opportunities through vigilant moral policing. A woman’s failure to obey custom would deprive her of the duty to safeguard the culture and thereby her opportunities to sabotage it.

The availability of alternative worldviews, interventionist activities of local reformers and foreign missionaries, and egalitarian values disseminated in the formal education in the modern period contributed to the resistance of women against gender discrimination. The preaching of Protestant missionaries and British penal law were other significant contributors to the cultural change. But the struggles of women, organized or sporadic, against gender inequalities did not spring up merely because of missionary and colonial interventions, as resistance against oppression is as old as bondage.

The Telugu Christian women found allies in women missionaries from the North Atlantic world. The ideological resources within the evangelical tradition with its emphasis on equality and the dire need of the missionaries for native collaborators offered Telugu Christian women opportunities not only to serve but also to lead the nascent community. Women converts introduced Christianity to their kin and invited them to convert. Some of them worked as paid agents. They joined professions such as nursing and school teaching. Some became zenana workers and taught literacy to Muslim and Hindu women.<sup>16</sup> Missionaries employed these zenana workers to teach literacy and subtly introduce Christianity to those women who would not interact with people outside their homes. A few appropriated the

ministerial office of Biblewoman, which the foreign women missionaries imported, to continue their leadership in the religious affairs of their communities.

In this process of collaboration with Western missionaries, Telugu Biblewomen were not mere recipients or mediators of a new worldview. The job title and basic description of the duties involved no doubt were imported but were not imposed wholesale by Western missionaries. The Telugu Biblewomen were not hapless objects, waiting only to be told. Instead they were active agents with a point of view of their own, with aspects both resonant and dissonant with that of their missionary employers.<sup>17</sup> They appropriated the evangelical faith and the office of Biblewoman according to their needs and context.

### HEARING VOICES OF THE NATIVE IN MISSIONARY TEXTS

Since Telugu Biblewomen left almost no written records of their motives, ideologies, and practices, I drew extensively on the archival material—textual and visual—of their missionary employers. In a context where the dominant historiography continues to privilege written records as legitimate sources of research, I have had to do some tightrope-walking,<sup>18</sup> that is, seek voices of the native women in the words of foreign missionaries.

Seeking data about Telugu women in the missionary literature has presented its own challenges. Missionary reporters often ignored the contributions of native women to the Christianization of the Telugus. Usually, they did not perceive their encounters with Dalit women worth reporting. This was consistent with a general missionary tendency to celebrate their encounters with men of “higher castes.” Women missionaries, including Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, a self-professed feminist and an American Baptist, were no exception to this.

If mentioned, the Biblewomen were rarely named but were often numbered. Missionaries regarded them as mere additions to their statistics. These numbers often were relegated to the end of a monthly or annual report as part of the financial summary. The donor was the intended reader and missionaries had to account for the money they received. However, in the main body of the reports, there were sporadic references to Biblewomen, especially in the periodicals, such as *Tidings* and *Lutheran Women*, which were published by women’s missionary societies. In their customary annual or monthly reports,

women missionaries made every effort to amplify the liberating impact of their work on native women. Instead of naming the person, however, writers often referred to them as “my Biblewoman.”

The missionary texts that I consulted served or aimed to serve at least four functions. First, these texts reported the activities of the missionaries and mission institutions, such as schools and hospitals, assuring the donor that her investment in the missionary enterprise had not gone in vain.<sup>19</sup> Second, they sought to stir interest among their compatriots either to fund the missionary cause or to become missionaries. Third, seeking continued support and goodwill, missionary writers often justified their intervention in Telugu cultural life, just as their colonial counterparts created excuses to colonize territories in Asia and Africa. Fourth, the missionary texts often aided the colonizing projects of the European communities and invented an “orient” that invited Western intervention, although some authors might not have intended to do so.

The missionary literature has been both useful and an agonizingly inescapable source. Without doubt, the portraits of the Telugu offer insight into the mind and agenda of the missionary writer. They tell us how the reporter perceived the native culture. They also reveal how the writer wanted her reader to visualize the Telugu. The native Christian occasionally found space in the stories but as a “trophy” or “jewel.” The latter designation was reserved for women.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the missionary indifference, Telugu Biblewomen made their way into the missionary literature, quietly emerging and quickly vanishing. The sparse references to their first names may reveal either something about their family background or at least the hopes of the missionary who renamed a convert. The family names often give important clues regarding their social location. The photographs of the Telugu Biblewomen in the literature provide an insight into their material culture. For example, a Bible in the hands of a Biblewoman reveals the association of the profession with Scripture.

Although these documents consist of missionary representations of the Telugu, the latter are not completely absent in them. The subject about whom a missionary writer is actively “inventing” was not mute in the process of his or her invention. The author and the subject influenced each other through the processes of interaction and encounter, collaboration and conflict. For example, John Clough, an American Baptist missionary, never could hide his admiration toward Yerraguntla Periah, an architect of Madiga conversions in Ongole. Clough admitted how Periah impacted his mission theology.<sup>21</sup>

While searching for voices of the native women in their own words, I elatedly stumbled upon at least two short autobiographies and a daily journal of one Biblewoman. One of the autobiographies was written by Sarah, a Telugu Biblewoman. I was delighted because these transcripts flowed from the pens of the Biblewomen, who seldom left any written accounts. At the same time, I had to caution myself that these transcripts were not immune to the influences of Western missionaries. The writers' voices were shaped and reshaped during the course of their interactions with missionaries. These Biblewomen related their stories when requested by their missionaries. They addressed the donors in the North Atlantic world, who supported the missionary enterprise. They were aware of what those readers wanted to hear from them. Moreover, missionary employers translated these texts into English, in which language they are available to us. The circumstances of writing and expectations of the intended audience influenced these transcripts. While interpreting these native narratives, I constantly asked myself how many and whose voices I am hearing in them.

Due to the blurring of voices in the available material, I inferred the patterns and practices of the Telugu Biblewomen. In the process, I found the proposal of sociologist James C. Scott very helpful. In his book, *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott suggests that everyday forms of resistance provide crucial clues in studying the stories of the weak.<sup>22</sup> According to him, social resistance manifests itself in everyday forms of resistance like feigned ignorance, rumors, proverbs, folklore, off-stage comments, and rituals.<sup>23</sup> Repeated gestures and informal practices provide clues for the study of the processes of conflict and collaboration that occur daily between an employer and the employed or the dominator and the dominated.<sup>24</sup> A curry with less salt, as a Telugu proverb suggests, can be a form of protest by a chef. In the context of my study, a married woman in a white saree is not an accident. Such gestures are capable of conveying what several tons of written pages cannot.

My upbringing in a Telugu Dalit family illuminated my understanding of these texts and the context out of which they emerged. The tales that my parents and grandparents related during my childhood about their experiences of slavery as Dalits and hopes as converts to Christianity informed my reading of the transcripts. Being born a male in a patriarchal society, no doubt has caused blind spots in reading the world of the women who are the subjects of this study. However, I am grateful to my four sisters who periodically and often unconsciously offered insights into the pain of growing up a woman

in Telugu society and the solace they found in religion. Though separated and connected by generations, the impressions I gathered at the sight of Biblewomen during my childhood and the continued conversations with their descendants proved to be very helpful in deciphering these texts.

Given my location in history and my gender, I am an outsider to the story as well. Born a male and in a family that had been Christian for the last two generations, my experiences differ from those of the Biblewomen. My encounters with the caste system and strategies for how to deal with it as a Dalit born in a Sudhra neighborhood vary from the women in this study, who were born in Dalit hamlets but crossed territorial restrictions when caste boundaries were more pronounced. I, therefore, constantly reminded myself of the historical contingencies that formed me. I attempted to subject myself to the same hermeneutics of suspicion that I applied to the data I read or the voices I heard in these texts.

## WEAVING A TALE

Having placed archival texts into conversation with their cultural milieu as well as drawing conclusions about an indigenous group from the historical transcripts, I organized my findings chronologically. This story begins with the transplanting of the profession to North Circars in the late 1870s. Since I examine the impact of the colonial environment on the mission ideology of Telugu women, it is appropriate to end the period of study at 1947, as it was the year when the British colonial era in the subcontinent ended. The tide of conversions to Christianity slowed down after 1947, as the “national” government restricted conversions to Christianity by denying Dalit converts the benefits of reservation provided under the affirmative discrimination.<sup>25</sup> With the native men taking over the “national” church, the office of Biblewoman began to eclipse after 1947.

The following chapter analyzes how indigenous and imported resources shaped the evolution of the profession among the Telugus. Setting the context for the emergence of the office, I narrate the contributions of native women to its evolution, especially from the late 1850s until 1880. This chapter briefly surveys the spread of Christianity in the region and then analyzes the beginnings of the profession in the London slums. In this chapter, I argue that the roots of the profession were neither completely alien nor entirely indigenous.

The third chapter traces the beginning of this ministerial office in the Northern Circars to 1880, locating it in the context of Dalit

conversions, feminization of Protestant missions, Telugu cultural renaissance, and increased access of native women to formal education in Telugu society. This second half of the chapter introduces some salient patterns of the profession in this period. I demonstrate how the social context and caste mores influenced its local contours.

The fourth chapter begins with the changes that occurred after the founding of women's seminaries, beginning in 1922. Highlighting the impact of the changing landscape of Telugu society in the heyday of the "nationalist" movement and growing interest of Sudhras in Christianity despite the threats of the "freedom fighters" against religious conversions on the profession, this section focuses on how Telugu Biblewomen negotiated between their urge for cultural change and their need for social respect.

The final chapter narrates the story of how the office of Biblewoman grew to be a global institution in the second half of the nineteenth century. It identifies some universal markers of the profession and analyzes how and why some of the ministerial practices of Telugu Biblewomen differed from or resonated with those of their counterparts in other continents. In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate how caste, gender, and empire influenced the distinct evolution of the profession among the Telugus through comparison with cases from Britain, China, and South Africa. The sources consulted are mostly secondary in nature and hence the findings of this comparative analysis are preliminary. The final chapter invites continued conversation on the global markers and regional variations of the profession around the world.

## MULTIPLE SCHOLARLY CONTEXTS

While working on this volume, I benefitted immensely from a number of ongoing scholarly discourses on gender, caste, empire, and Christian mission. These additional resources that I provide in the second half of this chapter would be of special interest and help to those seeking wider understanding of the subject of gender and mission. These conversations can be classified into four approaches—feminist, postcolonial, social, and socio-gender, based on the research questions asked and hermeneutical tools the authors applied in their studies. There may be some overlaps. Feminist historians studied how gender experiences of missionary women shaped their agenda and message. Social historians have examined how the caste experiences and social aspirations of the locals impacted the mass conversions in the Indian subcontinent. Of late, postcolonial feminist scholars have

been analyzing how the colonial environment impacted women missionaries' interactions with women in the erstwhile colonies.

## GENDER AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

R. Pierce Beaver, a church historian, initiated an academic conversation about women in Christian missions through his pioneering book, *All Loves Excelling*, which was first published in 1968.<sup>26</sup> His study examined the participation of American women in foreign missions as a mass movement. A decade later, Beaver published a second edition of this book with a different title, with an additional chapter on the participation of women in world mission in the 1970s.<sup>27</sup>

The foundation Beaver laid soon came to maturation in the mid-1980s with the writings of Dana Robert,<sup>28</sup> Jane Hunter,<sup>29</sup> and Patricia Hill.<sup>30</sup> These feminist historians considered the role gender played in perceptions and practices of Christian mission, focusing on foreign women missionaries from the North Atlantic region. They locate the perceptions and practices of these missionaries in the social context of the North Atlantic world, especially in the emerging feminist consciousness of the nineteenth century. The religious context of early nineteenth-century America, which was shaped by Enlightenment leanings and Evangelical Revivals, provided a broader context for the movement.

Some of these feminist historians portray woman missionaries as "new women," who sought and found new social status at home and abroad through their participation in foreign missions.<sup>31</sup> According to them, American missionary women redefined the ideals of womanhood through their participation in foreign missions and disseminated them in the non-Western world. These writings analyze how woman missionaries caused modernization in the non-Western world and cultural transformation of the North Atlantic world. They constructed a "bond of sympathy" between women in the North Atlantic region and their sisters in the non-Western world.<sup>32</sup>

Although these writers share many conclusions, they still differ in significant ways. Hunter and Hill find the aspirations of American women for equality as sources of women's participation in foreign mission. Studying the missionary activities of American women in China at the turn of the twentieth century, for example, Jane Hunter views the mission activism of American women as result of their social aspirations. Hunter, however, does not dismiss the religious motives of American missionary women but identifies human gratification as one of the primary motives of women's missionary activism.<sup>33</sup> Denied

social and religious opportunities in their homelands, American women sought opportunities for achievement, independence, and better status through their participation in foreign mission.<sup>34</sup> According to Hunter, not only were the motives of American women missionaries social but their impact was social as well.<sup>35</sup> Women missionaries transformed the missionary vocation into a career option, contributing to its professionalization.

Hunter, Hill, and Brouwer share some conclusions. They are critical of women missionaries for characterizing Asian women as benighted and secluded in order to justify their presence in India. They locate woman missionaries within the rising feminist consciousness of nineteenth-century North America. They highlight social and political motives for female missionary activism.

Not all feminist historians portray missionary women as “new women” with self-gratifying motives, however. Dana Robert, who studied the mission ideologies of American women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, identifies the motive of self-denial in women’s mission practice. According to her, American women collaborated with and even willingly subordinated their agendas and interests to the official structures of the church, which were often dominated by men. They evolved their own mission ideologies and still worked with male counterparts.<sup>36</sup> The spirit of self-denial thus has been an integral part of their missionary practice.<sup>37</sup> American women wanted to be “useful” for Christ and hence made sacrifices sometimes at the cost of their own interest. Amanda Porterfield, who examined the missionary interests of alumni from the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in the nineteenth century, concurs with Dana Robert about the spirit of self-denial broadly expressed among American women missionaries.<sup>38</sup>

The attitudes of these feminists on the issue of domesticity also vary. Hunter censured missionaries for preaching a message that confined native women to the home, while Hill celebrated them for expanding their household. On the other hand, Robert consistently argues that woman missionaries focused on creating Christian homes that provided Christian nurture. According to Robert, the maternal responsibilities of the missionary wives, their difficulties to itinerate, and the view of woman as a moral influence shifted their focus to Christian homes.<sup>39</sup>

These feminist renderings have their own limitations. First, while highlighting the bonds of sisterhood between North American women and their counterparts in Asia, they fail to consider adequately how race and empire influenced the relationships between the women

of various continents. Second, the political conditions and social aspirations of the non-Western women whom American woman missionaries aimed to Christianize have rarely found a place in their analysis. Third, as Chad Bauman suggests, they tend to project Western feminist aspirations on Indian Christian women and understand emancipation in linear terms.<sup>40</sup>

## EMPIRE, RACE, AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

A number of writers who trace their intellectual lineage to Edward Said and locate the production of cultural knowledge in the colonial context have contributed to the study of women and mission.<sup>41</sup> Borrowing methodological tools from the field of English literature, they highlight how empire and race shaped gender ideologies and relationships during the colonial era. For example, Gauri Viswanathan, in her book *Masks of Conquest*, a study of the dynamics of cultural domination and colonialism in the institution, practice, and ideology of English studies, argues that the teaching of English conferred power to the British in the Indian subcontinent and fortified it.<sup>42</sup> She acknowledges the agency of the native, who received, resisted, imbibed, and appropriated the ideological content offered to him or her.<sup>43</sup> She reminds us to historicize the interaction between British and Indian communities within the context of colonialism.<sup>44</sup>

Viswanathan uses her postcolonial lens to study religious conversions during the colonial era. She demonstrates how colonial dynamics impacted perceptions about religious conversions in her book *Outside the Fold*. She lists a plethora of motives, meanings, and consequences of religious conversions. In the case of mass conversions of Dalits to Buddhism, led by Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, a Marathi Dalit leader, she sees conversion as a political weapon.<sup>45</sup> Conversion to a dominant religion can also be consolidating, as it glues “renegade” individuals and “disparate” groups to a unified single tradition. According to Viswanathan, the series of conversions experienced by Pandita Ramabai, a Marathi Brahmin Christian, to various denominations within Christianity symbolizes both assimilation and defiance.<sup>46</sup>

Bringing the category of race into the discourse, Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel compiled a book, *Western Women and Imperialism*, which examined how the imperial agenda and race shaped gender ideologies in colonial contexts.<sup>47</sup> According to the authors, Western women in the colonies both complied with colonial politics and, at the same time, resisted them. Refusing to buy the singular “new” woman across the continents that some feminist

historians have created, they argue that race played a major role in shaping the encounters of Western women with their counterparts in the colonies. This group is critical of Western women missionaries as well as British feminists for portraying the Indian woman as a hapless colonial subject and for viewing themselves as morally superior to their South Asian counterparts.<sup>48</sup> British feminists assumed that their gender gave them an understanding of the experiences of Indian women, bypassing national and racial boundaries.<sup>49</sup> They proclaimed the racial superiority of Anglo-Saxons and thought that their race could redeem the rest of the world. Burton characterizes this responsibility as custodial, classist, ageist, and hierarchical.<sup>50</sup> Racism is implied. Burton, however, holds the imperial discourse of the colonial era responsible for such attitudes and argues that British feminists were “trapped” in it. They neither created it nor could they escape its influence. They, according to Burton, were passive collaborators with the colonial ideology.<sup>51</sup>

Applying a similar theoretical framework to the study of Christian mission, Susan Thorne examines the relationships between British missionaries and South Asian women. She argues that British women missionaries imported a ranking criterion based on race to grade Asian and African women.<sup>52</sup> According to her, British missionaries ranked the “civilized heathen” in Chinese and Indian races superior to those in other societies.<sup>53</sup> For example, Jemima Luke, a missionary in Malaysia, ranked the Hindu girls better than “Negros” or Malays.<sup>54</sup>

Indian historian Maina Singh, on the other hand, warns her post-colonial feminist colleagues against constructing a “singular white other.”<sup>55</sup> She refuses to confuse women missionaries with *memsahibs*, meaning wives of colonial officials. Race and empire may have factored in the interaction between women missionaries and native women. But the relationships of missionaries with native women were not always identical to those between *memsahibs* and women in the colonies.<sup>56</sup> Singh reminds us that mission compounds, with their easy accessibility to the natives, sometimes disturbed the colonial spatial arrangements. Moreover, even while furthering colonial objectives, the educational and health institutions founded by the missionaries could compete with colonial institutions.<sup>57</sup>

While some postcolonial historians, such as Leslie Flemming,<sup>58</sup> hold the colonial context responsible for the weakening of women’s status in South Asia, a stream of postcolonial studies recognizes the possibility of marginalized groups found in the colonial backdrop space renegotiating their social status. For example, admitting that colonial and missionary practices often disrupted the indigenous

power balance, Eliza Kent argues that the disruptive impact of colonial and missionary interventions proved to be advantageous to marginalized groups in the colonies.<sup>59</sup>

According to Kent, Tamil women, in their conversion to Christianity, renegotiated their social status.<sup>60</sup> Colonial rule made policing of the social boundaries by the dominant more difficult. With new networks of trade and association, communities found new ways of perceiving their social status. The social fissures that the colonial context created allowed communities to forge new identities. Gender roles dramatically altered because of emerging economic and employment patterns. Local women selectively appropriated aspects of Christian faith and practice that suited their interests.<sup>61</sup>

In summary, postcolonial scholars share at least six assumptions to varying degrees. First, they agree that the colonial context influenced the way the groups involved—colonizers, nineteenth-century feminists, missionaries, and the colonized—thought and behaved. Perpetuators, accomplices, and victims alike were trapped in the colonial reality. Second, colonial and missionary representations of the “native woman” were aimed at providing an alibi for colonial and missionary interventions.<sup>62</sup> Third, self-portraits of the Western missionaries as mothers and mentors reflect their arrogant (big-sisterly) attitudes.<sup>63</sup> In other words, they reveal the racial prejudices of Western women. Fourth, native communities were not hapless victims in colonial or missionary encounters. As active participants and agents, they either complied with or resisted what was offered to or imposed on them.<sup>64</sup> Fifth, some of them admit that the interests and agendas of missionaries and colonists were not the same. Sometimes they complemented and at other times they conflicted with each other. And sixth, a group within the school argues that the cultural disruption that occurred due to colonial and missionary presence in some ways empowered and in other ways weakened marginalized groups.

The hermeneutical tools that postcolonial writers introduced illuminate the role of race and empire in the colonial era. But they are not without limitations. Creating a singular native woman, some of these postcolonial scholars failed to recognize the conflicting interests among the native women and how these agendas influenced the interactions between the dominant and the marginalized. They focused on the native Christian women but mostly of the socially elite, such as Pandita Ramabai, a Christian of Brahmin descent.

In this volume, I argue that the colonial backdrop of modern Christian missionaries—native and foreign—shaped their paradigms and practices of mission. I agree that colonial rule disrupted the

cultural norms and disturbed the social balance, unconsciously creating a milieu conducive for “social engineering,” a process through which groups within a community disrupt, subvert, and reconstruct their *nomos* or social world.<sup>65</sup> While admitting that empire and race were influential in all that happened during the colonial era, I also argue that the social interests of various native groups in the colonies were equally responsible.

## CASTE AND CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Some social historians, such as John Webster,<sup>66</sup> Dick Kooiman,<sup>67</sup> Geoffrey Oddie,<sup>68</sup> and J. W. Gladstone,<sup>69</sup> studying the history of Christianity in India, have considered how the social aspirations of the marginalized, especially the victims of the caste system, influenced group conversions of Dalits to Christianity. Writing almost five decades after the publication of Jarrell W. Pickett’s findings, they agree with Pickett and his team that the social structures of the Indian sub-continent largely determined the mode of conversions. The commission instituted by the National Christian Council of India and headed by Jarrell W. Pickett earlier analyzed the social basis of the Dalit conversions to Christianity and rightly characterized them as community conversions. While analyzing the social factors responsible for the mass conversions, the group identified “all sorts of motives” including social interests of the convert groups.<sup>70</sup> Following Pickett, these social historians analyze the social aspirations of the converts and the impact of conversion on their status.

They depart from Pickett in highlighting the agency of the converts. They view missionaries as those who provided the context for the marginalized groups in their social struggles for dignity and equality. Unlike Pickett, who concluded that the decisions of the chieftains resulted in the mass conversions of Dalit communities, they argue that Dalits converted as small groups and clusters of families at separate times.<sup>71</sup> However, these historians did not pay due attention to the role gender played in how women responded to and appropriated Christianity.

## GENDER AND CASTE TOGETHER

A small group of womanist scholars has reminded feminists and social scientists to use both gender and caste together in interpreting Indian history, cautioning against employing only one at the expense of the other. These writers highlight the symbiotic relationship between

caste and gender. In her introduction to the book *Gender and Caste*, Anupama Rao challenges the tendency of many feminists to create a singular Indian woman. She argues that struggles against caste inequalities and fight against patriarchal values are intrinsically connected and interdependent.<sup>72</sup>

Uma Chakravarti also advises us to consider caste and gender together in studying experiences of Indian women.<sup>73</sup> Chakravarti argues that caste and gender discriminations are interdependent and cement each other. Both find their support from the practice of endogamy. While the caste system controls modes of production, endogamy regulates reproductive activities.<sup>74</sup> The caste system survives only when sexual relations are policed by the dominators who benefit from its rules. Ritualizing female sexuality, therefore, becomes crucial in maintaining and consolidating the bounded nature of each group.<sup>75</sup> In this social mechanism, women themselves become the property of men, in terms of both their reproductive and productive labor.<sup>76</sup> The only function of upper caste women is to provide sexual labor for their men and reproduce their heir.<sup>77</sup> The higher their caste in the hierarchy, the more stringent the restrictions on its women were. Thus, the women in the bottom of the social ladder had greater freedom, as their sexual interactions did not necessarily alter their status.

Rao and Chakravarti alert us to be conscious of our own caste and gender identities and interests. No scholar is disembodied from his or her caste and gender interests. Rao, therefore, contests the right of Brahminical feminists to speak for all Indian women. She finds also in male sociologists a tendency to reproduce patriarchal norms in Dalit studies.<sup>78</sup>

## STUDIES ABOUT BIBLEWOMEN

Beginnings have been made in the study of Biblewomen. An early essay by mission historian Ruth Tucker focused attention on the contributions of Biblewomen to the modern missionary movement.<sup>79</sup> More than a decade later, Jane Haggis and Eliza Kent have studied two groups of Tamil Biblewomen. Haggis examined the contradiction between missionary expectations and results of professionalization of the office of Biblewoman.<sup>80</sup> According to her, Tamil Biblewomen who associated with the London Missionary Society (LMS) in south Travancore were expected to be “good wives and mothers” in order to exemplify Christian home. They rather became public figures equally as ease in public life given the opportunities that their profession as

Biblewomen provided them. Studying the case of Tamil Biblewomen who worked with the American Madurai Mission, Kent underlines how the Biblewomen identified the points of intersection between their new faith and that of their non-Christian audience in order to communicate the Christian message and arrive at a hybrid conception of femininity.<sup>81</sup>

Continuing the conversation, Deborah Gaitskell, a British feminist historian, published an insightful essay that examined the case of South African Biblewomen, further stimulating scholarly interest in the study of Biblewomen.<sup>82</sup> Around the same time, Mrinalini Sebastian, an Indian scholar, demonstrated how a postcolonial feminist reading could be employed in the study of mission texts and in the writing of mission history.<sup>83</sup> She called upon mission historians to view the faith and experiences of missionaries and their local allies against the political backdrop of colonialism. At the same time, she advises historians not to be reductionist and impose Western feminist aspirations for equality on native women. Citing the case of her own grandmother, Tejaswini Amanna, a Biblewoman who worked with Basel Mission, Sebastian wondered whether the motives of Amanna in joining the profession should be reduced to only economic or feminist aspirations.

Deborah Gaitskell, along with Wendy Urban-Mead, an American historian, later coedited the September 2008 edition of *Women's History Review* that carried five essays about Biblewomen.<sup>84</sup> Citing the cases of Biblewomen in north India with the LMS and Scottish Presbyterian missions in the last decades of the nineteenth century, Rhonda Semple focuses on the inequalities based on race within the missionary movement.<sup>85</sup> She argues that adopting race was a social marker through which missionaries sought respect within their communities at home for the missionary profession.<sup>86</sup>

In a case study of Sitshokupi Sibanda, a Biblewoman in colonial Zimbabwe in the first half of the twentieth century, Wendy Urban-Mead examines the complex negotiation that took place between a male-dominated mission church that indirectly accommodated the mission activism of women and an African woman who incorporated missionary practices as part of her spirituality.<sup>87</sup> Urban-Mead describes the ways Sibanda mediated between the worldview of her missionary employers and that of Mwali culture.

Vanessa Wood and Valarie Griffiths study the practices of Biblewomen in China. Relying extensively on the letters and journals of her grandmother, Myfanwy Wood, a LMS missionary, Wood traces the evolution of the profession in the Siaochang district in the first

half of the twentieth century, highlighting changes in the educational levels and practices of Chinese Biblewomen.<sup>88</sup> Tracing the origins of the office of Biblewoman to London, Valerie Griffiths analyzes how Chinese women appropriated the concept of Biblewoman, a foreign “female mission idea,” in the last few decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>89</sup> According to Griffiths, local social dynamics played a significant role in the evolution of the office in China.

Meanwhile, two recent studies assess the impact the profession made on the social status of the Chinese Biblewomen. As part of her doctoral research, Ellen Xiang-Yu Cai is evaluating how joining the profession contributed to the social mobility of Chinese Biblewomen, especially in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>90</sup> Xiangyu examines the changes and continuities in the social status of Biblewomen who worked with Adela Fielde, a Baptist missionary in the region of Chaozho, South China. In a chapter in the collection of essays published by Jessie Lutz, Ling Oi Ki analyzes how Chinese female evangelists overcame social disabilities by becoming Biblewomen.<sup>91</sup> According to Ki, Chinese Biblewomen not only improved their status in society but through their lifestyle and activities also earned credibility for their new religion.

## OFFERING ALTERNATIVES

While gratefully drawing from the current discourses, this book also seeks to enrich some of these conversations; it, at times, humbly offers correctives. It challenges the assumption that the modern missionary movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries belonged either to Western (male and female) missionaries or to native male evangelists. While not denying both narratives, this case submits that native women were equally responsible for the expansion and articulation of Christianity in the region under study, as in other areas of the world. In the Northern Circars, Western missionaries offered an alternative worldview. Native male ministers attended to the religious needs of the converts. Christian women, especially the Biblewomen, played a crucial role, both in the transmission of the Christian faith as well as in the evolution of Telugu Christianity. They introduced Christianity to non-Christians and interpreted Scripture in more informal situations such as in homes, in hospitals, and at street-corners. They defined and modeled Christian piety within emerging Christian communities. The expansion of Christianity in the modern period in this part of India resulted not merely because of the activities of native clergy and/or Western missionaries. Indeed, local women could be equally,

and sometimes more, responsible for the spread of Christianity in the modern period.

The use of the vernacular in the transmission of the Christian message provided native Christians and their pre-Christian cultural idioms more space in the shaping of local Christianity, as Lamin Sanneh argues.<sup>92</sup> The importance given to local language in the communication of the gospel often contributed to the revitalization of local cultures and fomented nationalist sentiments in the erstwhile colonies, sometimes to the dismay of the missionaries themselves. This case attests to such processes of translation among the Telugu Christians. It, at the same time, identifies distinct, often conflicting, interests within the local communities. The local is not monolithic.

Having been subverted by subjugated communities such as this one, the Christian faith as it is articulated and practiced in the non-Western world, offers theological resources that are liberationist despite having emerged from the colonial contexts. Although all theologies that evolved in the process were not liberationist theologies *per se*, there is a liberative potential in each of them. They are contextual with respect to the communities out of which they emerged and have a lot to offer to our understanding of world Christianity.

I am indebted to the tools that postcolonial historians have introduced. Like many of my colleagues, I acknowledge that the colonial context of the nineteenth century impacted missionary agendas and disrupted local cultures. But the tale of Telugu Biblewomen does not fit into the “nationalist” postcolonial narratives that characterize native catalysts of change—religious and social—as local surrogates of foreign intruders, whether a Western missionary or a European colonizer.

For example, Jayawardena argues that Pandita Ramabai lost an opportunity to emerge truly national by converting to Christianity.<sup>93</sup> According to Jayawardena, Ramabai deprived herself an opportunity to lead her nation against the colonial rule through her affiliation with the religion of the colonizers. I deliberately resist the temptation to create a singular nation within colonial India.<sup>94</sup> Nor do I view converts to Christianity, the religion of the colonizers, as alien. Acknowledging pluralities of nations within the subcontinent, I argue that some native women appropriated theological resources in the Christian faith and colonial environment in their struggles against the gender- and caste-based oppressions in the local cultures. Both the roots of their discontent and the modus operandi of their struggles were local. They were as national as their sisters in other religions who did not choose to convert.

## NAMING OR MISNAMING?

While introducing the religious institution we will be studying in the following pages, this chapter reconstructed the cultural and political backdrop of the movement, introduced the historical questions, hermeneutical tools, and existing scholarly conversations relevant to the subject matter. The following chapters refer to terms and concepts from South Asian cultures that some audience may find alien. The glossary in the front pages provides a cursory glance at what these terms literally mean.

In this volume, I have frequently and unabashedly used the category Dalit in reference to those ethnic groups that were outside the four-tiered Hindu society. In the context of coastal Andhra, this term refers mostly to Malas and Madigas. Baindas, Jangams, Poturajus, Mashti, Dandems, Bandelas, Sindhollu, Dekkali, Mattitolu, and Madiga Bogam are other Dalit communities in the region.

Nomenclature to writers is what surgical tools are to a surgeon. I admit the problems in the use of the term Dalit to Malas and Madigas. These communities seldom viewed themselves as kin groups although the dominant castes have identified them together as *avaranas* (ones without color, category, or class), *chandalas* (filthy ones) and *panchamas* (the fifth castes). They do not see each other as parts of a larger grouping despite sharing experiences of subjugation and cultures of resistance.<sup>95</sup> Rivalry, suspicion, and hostility characterize the relationship between the two communities.

Neither did the dominant majority refer to them nor did these groups identify themselves as Dalits during the period under study. With no courage to name themselves or their group, both Malas and Madigas often referred to themselves as *banchas* (slaves) in their encounters with “caste” men and women. The Indian National Congress, which claimed to be the vanguard of “nationalist” interests, named them *harijans* from the 1930s. Although it was coined by Jyotirao Phule, a Marathi poet, in the late nineteenth century, the term Dalit was not claimed by Dalit activists and scholars until a century later. Thus the use of the term Dalit may be an anachronism.

However, I referred Malas and Madigas as Dalits occasionally and for more than one reason. First, the classifications imposed by the dominant are impregnate with contempt. The word *harijan* is no exception. Second, the use of self-designated titles by Dalits during the period endorses a social system against which they were struggling. Third, referring to them as Malas and Madigas is a viable option, which I did whenever the particular identity of a person or

group could be ascertained. I identified them as Dalits only when the sources are silent about the group identity or the family name of the person in study. I have occasionally used this broader category to include both communities while referring to some of their shared customs and experiences. I have done the same with the Sudhra communities, another noun that groups numerous subcastes together.

With an awareness of terms, methods, sources, and the subject matter, let us now trace the origins of the profession of Biblewoman in the following chapter.

## FOREMOTHERS AND FOREIGN SISTERS

In forging a new identity and evolving a distinct ministry, Telugu Biblewomen retained ideas and practices from their pre-Christian culture while borrowing some from their European counterparts. Holding on to their traditional leadership roles in the religious affairs of the community even after their conversion to Christianity, they brought with them the practices of itinerancy and preaching into the Christian community. At the same time, they inherited practices of Bible-reading, social activism, and house visiting from their counterparts in Britain. Thus, the roots of the profession in Telugu speaking regions were neither completely foreign nor totally native.

### TELUGU WOMEN AND THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

Women, no doubt, played crucial roles in the origins and evolution of Roman Catholic and Protestant communities in the region but the space they occupied and the strategies they employed varied. The social background of the convert communities and theological space provided in each tradition in part contributed to these differences. The first part of this chapter surveys the spread of Christianity among the Telugus, highlighting how the native women used space provided in their pre-Christian worlds in the preaching of the new religion. Due to the dearth of sources, the narration of women's leadership in the spread of Christianity among the Telugus is fragmentary.

#### Contacts of Telugus with Roman Catholic Christianity

While the propagation of Christianity and the presence of Christians among the Telugus date back to the early sixteenth century, Telugu communities did not show interest in Christianity until the early eighteenth century. The activities of missionaries until then, by and large, were limited to the court of the Vijayanagar Empire at

Chandragiri. Luis da Salvador, a Franciscan missionary, was the first Christian missionary to introduce Christianity in the region. Having been deputized in 1505 by Pedro Alvarez Cabral, a Portuguese colonial administrator at Goa, as an emissary to negotiate trade with the native rulers, da Salvador, while representing the commercial interests of the Portuguese kings, also preached the Christian message at court.<sup>1</sup> With the permission of the local king, da Salvador occasionally preached Christianity outside the court. His missionary activities ended abruptly when he was murdered. Antonio de Padrao, a Franciscan missionary, succeeded his martyred colleague in 1530 at the court, followed by a group of Jesuit missionaries led by Francis Ricci in 1597.<sup>2</sup>

Ricci and his colleagues, stationed in the court for 17 years, focused on the Christianization of the royal family. Like their colleagues at Akbar's court, they used diplomacy and debates to convince local princes, hoping that the conversion of the rulers would culminate in the Christianization of their subjects.<sup>3</sup> Similar to their Franciscan predecessors, the Jesuits asked Venkata Rajulu for permission to preach outside the palace.<sup>4</sup> Venkata Rajulu, who was in need of a military alliance with the Portuguese administration at Goa due to the continued threats from Muslim rulers, consented to their request.<sup>5</sup> As part of their Christianizing program outside the palace, Jesuit missionaries built a church, translated portions of Christian literature into Telugu, and opened a school for children of caste origins. Their efforts resulted in the conversion of a few Telugus in the 17 years of their service.<sup>6</sup> The missionary activities of Francesco Maneo of the Theatines and Father Gallo, who preached among the Sudhra communities in Machilipatnam and Narsapuram respectively in the second half of the sixteenth century, were the exceptions to this pattern of preaching to the dominant to Christianize the ruled.

Strategies and results changed in the eighteenth century. Jesuit missionary attention went outside the royal courts but still focused on the social elite. Father Mauduit, who reached Punganur in 1701, sought converts among "high caste" families and found a few. While Dasari<sup>7</sup> and Brahmin communities resisted, several families of Velama, Kamma, and Reddy castes converted to Christianity.<sup>8</sup> Besides preaching in the districts of Anantapuram, Chittoor, and Kadapa, Catholic missionaries also toured toward the north in the coastal districts of Andhra and Telengana.<sup>9</sup>

As wives and mothers, Telugu women played a significant role in these conversions to Christianity. Missionary letters reveal not only a Roman Catholic view of the home as a primary sanctuary and the

mother as an auxiliary to the priest but also that of Telugu families of Sudhra origins that confined women to home and considered them moral influences in the family.<sup>10</sup> Women, who were expected to follow the religion of their fathers, husbands, or sons, were also called upon to guide men in the religious life of the family. Given this power to protect or subvert the religious life of the family, some women quietly “induced” the conversion of men to Christianity in their families.<sup>11</sup>

Early missionaries told of some notable women who played an active role in the conversion of their families. An unnamed widow of the Velama caste is one of these. Along with her four sons, she converted to Christianity in Punganur.<sup>12</sup> Mauduit baptized three sons immediately in 1701 and employed the oldest as catechist, the first in the Telugu communities.<sup>13</sup> He, however, delayed the baptism of the mother and wanted to “try” her before baptizing her.<sup>14</sup> Antonius Kroot, a Roman Catholic missionary-historian, argued that the woman’s deep-rooted affiliation with the Lingayit<sup>15</sup> tradition was the reason for the delay. Kroot did not state whether the baptism of the mother following those of her sons was strategic on the part of the woman to evade the possible wrath of the larger family.

Jesuit missionaries benefitted from the patronage of royal matrons as well. For example, Sidione de la Fountaine, who succeeded Mauduit at Punganur, impressed the mother of the local king and earned her support for his missionary activities.<sup>16</sup> Fountaine, who introduced himself as “Romapuri Sanyasin” or a monk from Rome, found considerable interest in Christianity among the Brahmins.

Antonius Kroot, translating the letters of Catholic missionaries, was surprised to find women leading the conversion of their families in favor of Christianity although their gender restricted their roles in other spheres.<sup>17</sup> Citing Calmette, a Catholic missionary of the eighteenth century, Kroot named Gali Annamma, a Kamma from Kadapa district, to illustrate the important role women played in the Christianization of Telugu families. Annamma was responsible for the conversion of her husband and her daughter.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in the eighteenth century, at the behest of local women, several families of caste origins embraced Christianity.

The missionary activities of European Catholics among the Telugus slowed down in the middle of the eighteenth century, only to recover a century later with the formation of a vicariate in Secunderabad in 1851 and the appointment of David Murphy as its bishop.<sup>19</sup> The arrival in 1855 of two Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIME) missionaries, don Francesco Pozzi and don Giovanni Domenico Barbero, later marked the resurgence of Catholic missionary activities.<sup>20</sup> The

series of Carnatic Wars between French and British armies in the second half of the century, the British occupation of Machilipatnam and Pondicherry in 1759 and 1761 respectively, the ceding of the Circars to the British by the nizam in 1766, and the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, hampered the missionary activities of European Catholics but did not eliminate the Catholic presence from the region.<sup>21</sup> Numerous women's orders established in the second half of the nineteenth century contributed to the steady growth of the Catholic community in the region.

### **Protestantism and the Birth of Telugu Christianity**

Telugu communities first heard about Protestant Christianity through the presence and preaching of colonial officers and European missionaries. Dutch and British officials resided in the region from the early eighteenth century. Some colonists with evangelical leanings shared their faith with native collaborators and even attempted to translate the Bible into Telugu.<sup>22</sup> But the native converts, most of whom were Dalits, played a key role in the growth of Protestant Christianity. While women in the Roman Catholic tradition provided leadership as mothers and wives, Protestant women could claim more public roles as evangelists and organizers given the space women had in the Dalit cult.

It is appropriate to refer briefly to the space women occupied in the Dalit cult before narrating the story of Protestantism among the Telugus, as the religious leadership of Telugu women predates the arrival of Protestant missionaries. Telugu women, especially those of Dalit background, had been influential in the cultic life of their communities for a considerable time before this.<sup>23</sup>

At the symbolic level, feminine representations of deity dominated the Dalit pantheon. Telugu Dalits worshipped goddesses, such as Mariamma, Poleramma, Poshamma, Gonti, Ellamma, Kaamma, Morasamma, Matangi (Mathamma), Somalamma, and Moosamma.<sup>24</sup> They demanded veneration of these deities from caste communities, especially during the periods of natural calamity or epidemic. According to them, every village was governed by a guardian goddess. Hence, residents in a village regardless of their caste placated the presiding (Dalit) deity during the times of threshing corn, building new houses, or opening newly dug wells. Other deities in the pantheon received special sacrifices in seasons of need and bounty. For example, the goddess Gonti, a synonym for her whimsical demands, was invoked in seasons of famine.<sup>25</sup> Thus, to varying degrees, such goddesses dominated the cultic life of Dalits.

An example of three associated deities illustrates the roles Dalit religiosity assigned to female deities. The goddess Ellamma was believed to be the common force behind all creation.<sup>26</sup> Devotees recognized her presence in all that is living. Ellamma was believed to be present in all the tongues that speak and to be revealed in fire and flames (at the time of burnt offering). Her associate Matangi was much more imminent than Ellamma. All communities, including Brahmins, worshipped her although Madigas claim monopoly over her. She was believed to be responsible for protecting communities from drought and disease. While Ellamma and Matangi represented the creative and governing aspects of nature, Pothuraj, the blood-thirsty male deity in this trio, was believed to be the beneficiary of sacrifices.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while female deities dominated the Dalit pantheon, their male counterparts could play subsidiary roles to the goddesses.

In terms of performance, both men and women participated in the cultic leadership and needed these Dalit traditions. The practices and beliefs varied in different locales but there were some shared characteristics. Pambalas (Mala) and Asadis (Madiga) men functioned as transmitters of cosmologies through storytelling.<sup>28</sup> They also conducted weddings.<sup>29</sup> At the time of sacrifice, men killed animals (often a buffalo) or birds as offerings to the deity.<sup>30</sup> Madiga men led religious processions as drummers.<sup>31</sup>

Dalit women also served as priests but their roles differed from those of their male counterparts.<sup>32</sup> They represented the presence or voice of the deity. For example, named after the goddess Matangi, a Madiga woman was considered to be an incarnation of Matangi.<sup>33</sup> Consecrated in childhood as a priestess after a careful examination, this human Matangi represented the goddess in all public religious activities.<sup>34</sup> Despite her “defiling” Madiga origins, she presided at the purificatory ceremonies that preceded all village feasts and festivals.<sup>35</sup> On appointed seasons in a year, she led ritual processions, visiting every lane in the village and entering caste houses at her will. During her march, she abused caste landlords and spat on them, a gesture that the social elite considered to be purifying.

Women also uttered divine oracles, often prescribing remedies for the epidemics or famines that plagued villages. John Carman, a historian of religion and son of a Baptist missionary, described a ritual during which a Kolpula woman transmitted the oracles from the cholera goddess.<sup>36</sup> The role of male priests was limited to invoking the goddess through their drums and the killing of sacrificial animals. A woman, on the other hand, typically served as an intermediary between the deity and her village. Thus, the religious systems that

Dalit groups had evolved and promoted among the socially dominant provided more space for women.

Shrines and feasts named after women saints further reflect the prominent place women played in the religious life of the Telugus at the popular level. The durgah of Basheer Beebi, a Muslim saint, in Ponnada of East Godavari district, and the shrine of Veeramma in Vuyyuru of Krishna district illustrate the prominence of women in Dalit religiosity.<sup>37</sup> These sacred monuments, which drew crowds from the all communities, underscore the power of the feminine in the popular expressions of Hindu and Dalit religions.

Against this background of female leadership, Protestant missionaries began their work among the Telugus. Benjamin Schultze of Danish-Halle background was the earliest Protestant missionary to work among the Telugus.<sup>38</sup> Having moved to Chennai in 1726, Schultze, who arrived in Tarangabadi (Tranquebar) seven years earlier, worked among the Telugus in the port city. In 1805, two LMS missionaries, George Cran and Augustus Desgranges, arrived and introduced Christianity in Visakhapatnam, another port city. In addition to translating the Christian Scriptures into Telugu and printing them, missionaries established schools and taught literacy to help the natives to read scriptural portions.

The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a procession of Protestant missionaries in the region. American Baptist and Plymouth Brethren missionaries arrived in 1836. Pioneering missionaries of American Lutheran background and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) followed in 1841. As a response to the appeal of British officers in Machilipatnam, the CMS appointed Robert T. Noble, a Cambridge alumnus, and Henry W. Fox, an Oxford alumnus, as its missionaries to the region.

The Plymouth Brethren were the first ones to forge alliances with Dalits in the Northern Circars. Five years before the arrival of Noble and Fox, British officers in Machilipatnam welcomed John V. Parnell, a Scottish Brethren missionary.<sup>39</sup> William Bowden and George Beers, Plymouth Brethren, joined Parnell in 1836. An absence of chaplains at the cantonment and a shared interest in the Christianization of the Telugus caused and sustained the cordial relationship between the Brethren and local British officials. After learning Telugu at Machilipatnam, Bowden moved to Palakollu, which was a Dutch colony until 1804, and Beers relocated to Narsapuram. Parnell, who ministered to the spiritual needs of the European community in Machilipatnam, left for Tamilnadu the same year. Antony N. Groves, considered the “father of faith missions,” moved to Chittoor in 1837.<sup>40</sup>

Perceiving themselves as “faith” missionaries, the Brethren did not affiliate with an organized mission agency. Instead, they depended on the generosity of individual donors.

As these Plymouth Brethren missionaries expanded their activities in the delta between the Godavari and Krishna rivers, a group of Madigas in Palakollu converted to Christianity in the late 1840s. Invited by General Arthur Cotton, a British military officer and a civil engineer of evangelical persuasion, William Bowden introduced Christianity to Dalits who were employed at the construction of a dam at Dowleshwaram during the drought years of 1847 and 1848.<sup>41</sup> Returning to Palakollu, Bowden preached in weekly fairs, visited neighboring villages, and practiced homeopathy. Dalits did not show interest in Christianity until the late 1840s. Bowden reported no conversions for the first five years in Palakollu and claimed only 27 baptisms in the next ten years. The overall numbers appear insignificant but a discernible rise in numbers toward the end of the 1840s marks the beginning of a significant trend.

As it happened, a group conversion of Madigas in Palakollu became the first of a series of mass conversions of Telugu Dalits to Christianity. The Mala group conversions in Krishna district followed in 1859 when Pagolu Venkayya of Raghavapuram invited Thomas Y. Darling to baptize his community members.<sup>42</sup> Like in other Dalit conversions, it is a native who took the initiative to organize the congregation.<sup>43</sup> Kola Atchamma, a Madiga woman, gathered a group of converts mostly from her community when Bowden was away in Dowleshwaram during the famine of 1847–1848, preaching to the construction workers engaged in the building of an irrigation dam.<sup>44</sup> Atchamma, a concubine of a European colonial official, would have heard of Christianity even before meeting the Bowdens.<sup>45</sup> Christians of Dutch origins resided in the town, as it was their colony on the subcontinent for around a century.<sup>46</sup> The Madiga congregation in Palakollu was thus the result of the missionary labors of a native woman.

The sight of a woman preacher, especially among the natives, was a puzzle for male missionary bureaucrats, especially those located in Europe and North America. It is not uncommon to find in their reports and histories that women preachers are characterized as deviant in some way. W. T. Stunt, for example, who was a Plymouth Brethren executive, described Atchamma as “not very promising material” but quickly admitted that she proved to be a very “bright and eager witness.”<sup>47</sup> W. T. Stunt and Frederick Tatford, relying on missionary field reports, highlighted Atchamma’s status as the former

concubine of a European officer.<sup>48</sup> It was not only the Brethren reporters who underlined the marital status of a woman preacher. A Canadian Baptist missionary bureaucrat, A. A. Scott, identified Hariamma, a Biblewoman, as Gurhati's "concubine" although his compatriots in India had officiated at the wedding between the latter two.<sup>49</sup> These portraits seem to show the unease of some male mission executives with the idea of women preachers.

The practice of some assertive women living in conjugal relationships with European colonizers in order to secure financial security was not completely rare. There were some cases of native women marrying Portuguese soldiers and converting to Christianity.<sup>50</sup> Eliza Kent's analysis of the courtship of the Royal Clarinda, whose original name was Kohila, a Brahmin of Marathi descent in Tamilnadu, with an English military officer, helps us to understand the practice and its bearing on the religious identity of those in relationship.<sup>51</sup> The colonial masters condoned it even while publicly condemning it. These relationships did not find favor with respect to the sexual mores of either the missionaries or the natives. Even if such unions did not usually result in marriage, some women earned estates or at least children. Most of them risked losing the respect of their communities for financial security.<sup>52</sup> Kohila, a Brahmin, had more at stake than Atchamma, who was a Dalit. Atchamma might have risked her self-respect in order to rid herself of the social stigma that came with her ethnic identity. It is also likely that, through her association with a colonizer, she was challenging the sexual norms of the dominant culture, which pronounced her to be an untouchable. But like Kohila, Atchamma earned respect by organizing a congregation.

### **Early Dalit Conversions and Women Evangelists**

While Kola Atchamma epitomizes the evangelist as organizer, Satyamma and Nagamma represent those Dalit women who traveled and introduced Christianity to their kin in neighboring villages. Satyamma, wife of Bangarapu Thathiah, traversed the villages around Ongole, accompanied by her husband, and preached Christianity.<sup>53</sup> Satyamma, a Madiga woman of the Kanigiri region, earlier opposed the conversion of her husband to Christianity. She eventually became an enthusiastic promoter of conversions to Christianity.<sup>54</sup> Both by initially opposing her husband's unilateral decision to convert and then by promoting conversions to their faith, Satyamma asserted her role as a cultic leader.

Satyamma earlier followed the ideology of the Rajayogi sect, a folk religious movement founded by Pothuluri Veerabrahmam in the early nineteenth century, which encouraged women's preaching. Veerabrahmam was not a Dalit but most of the followers and teachers of his ideology were. Typical of a missionary religion, Rajayogies—male and female religious teachers—invited their neighbors and initiated them into their movement. The activities of Bandikatla Veeramma, a Sudhra woman, who initiated several Madigas including Thathiah and Periah into the tradition, illustrate the leadership role women played in this movement.<sup>55</sup> According to Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, this movement proved to be a *preparatio evangelio*, as several Rajayogis later converted to Christianity and became evangelists.<sup>56</sup> Given the resemblance of some of its ideas and practices, especially the teaching of social equality, faith in a risen prophet, and the hope of a millennial rule, with those of Christianity, Madigas embraced the latter with little hesitation in the 1860s.<sup>57</sup>

The practice of propagating faith by woman preachers is another aspect of religious practice brought into the Protestant missionary movement from this tradition. For example, it is known that Satyamma embraced the Rajayogi tradition at the preaching of Bandikatla Veeramma. Veeramma, who was on a visit to her daughter in the village, introduced the religion to her neighbors.<sup>58</sup> The encounter between Veeramma, a Sudhra, and Satyamma, a Madiga, reveals a deliberate attempt to blur the caste boundaries within the movement. Subsequently, Satyamma undertook similar journeys to her relatives and introduced the Christian faith to them as well as to their neighbors.

Nagamma, a Madiga and the wife of Yerraguntla Periah from Ongole, was another such woman who traveled with her husband, visiting her kin and introducing Christianity to them. Her travels contributed to the mass conversion of Madigas in the region during the 1870s. Indeed, John E. Clough, an American Baptist missionary, admitted that it was Nagamma who drew women toward Christianity in the Madiga conversions in Ongole.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, Telugu Christian women held on to their opportunities to influence the religious practices of their families and to lead their communities while converting to Christianity. Veeramma, a priestess-turned-Biblewoman from Bodaguntla, a village adjacent to Vuyyuru, epitomizes the continued cultic leadership of women in the new religious community.<sup>60</sup>

## BRITISH BIBLEWOMEN AND THEIR MINISTERIAL PRACTICES

Telugu Biblewomen, who inherited a tradition of religious leadership from their Telugu foremothers, also received a job title and some of their practices from their British counterparts. A strong association with the Bible, the practice of house visiting, and an interest in social change resonate with those of their counterparts in Britain, where the profession originated in 1857. In order to locate the origins of the office in nineteenth-century England, it is necessary to show how the religious and cultural climate of that context shaped some of the practices of British Biblewomen.

### Setting the Stage

#### *Industrialization and Social Reconfigurations*

The industrialization and the colonial expansion of nineteenth-century England brought in migrants from its neighboring nations to provide labor in its factories.<sup>61</sup> These migrations diversified the religious landscape of nineteenth-century England.<sup>62</sup> Quoting the Census of 1851, Frances Knight estimates that only 60 percent of the English population identified with the Church of England.<sup>63</sup> The nonconformists and Roman Catholics together constituted one thirds of the population. The rest included Jews, Muslims, Theosophists, Spiritualists, secularists, and atheists. The multiplicity of cultures and creeds becoming manifest in England startled the emerging evangelical community, which in turn sought to homogenize the masses with their worldview. A low-church Anglican, Ellen Henrietta (nee White) Ranyard, whom I will mention later in this chapter, described the London slums as “dark places of the earth in the heart of our Christian city.”<sup>64</sup>

The phenomenon of industrialization also resulted in the emergence of a new middle class that would eventually play a significant role in England through philanthropic activities and parliamentary politics.<sup>65</sup> Men of this class took an active part in political agitations such as the Abolition Movement. Women attempted to compete with their men in social activism. At the same time, seeking to consolidate their new status, they emulated their counterparts in the upper class who often confined their activities to their households. These twin attempts to influence public life and to imitate their upper-ranking sisters pushed them into a perpetual search for appropriate avenues of self-expression.

Meanwhile, women in poorer neighborhoods worked for factories and often from home, making the latter their work place. The

“slopwork” they engaged in included chain making, bookbinding, mattress weaving, wood-box making, and tailoring.<sup>66</sup> For example, girls between the ages of 12 and 18 worked for the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), employed on a daily basis in its bindery.<sup>67</sup>

Paid for the number of units they produced or worked with in a day, the working-class women received lower wages as compared to men.<sup>68</sup> According to Edward Cadbury, an early nineteenth-century social scientist, and his colleagues, women were paid 10 to 12 shillings a week, which was about one-third of what men received.<sup>69</sup> Cadbury, without citing any source, claimed that the BFBS was not an exception to this pattern.<sup>70</sup> Given the need for work and meager wages, many women looked for alternative jobs and supplemental income. For example, a fruit vendor in the streets of London might sell religious tracts alongside her produce.<sup>71</sup> Thus, while middle-class women were seeking for avenues of influence, their working-class sisters were struggling to subsist.

#### *Evangelical Revivals and the Recovery of the Bible*

Evangelicalism, which played a crucial role in the shaping of nineteenth-century England, encouraged its adherents to live out their faith in social life. Highlighting the universality of sin, a subsequent need for salvation, and the salvific efficacy of Christ’s death, evangelicalism insisted on the need for the interior conversion of an individual. The converted eagerly shared the good news of salvation available in Christ. Driven by their faith convictions, they sought cultural changes both in England as well as abroad and demanded benevolence toward to those in need of help.<sup>72</sup> These seasons of grace were wrought by the Holy Spirit but they needed to be cultivated through human agents.

Itinerant preachers fanned the flames of revival with Bibles in their hands.<sup>73</sup> As evangelicalism spread beyond Methodist congregations, it evoked considerable interest in Scripture and a longing for conversion in others. For example, a group of pious and reform-minded Anglicans in Clapham, often identified as the “Clapham Sect,” printed and circulated the Scriptures among their compatriots.

The multiplicity of languages that evangelicals came into contact with through trade, colonial expansion, and the missionary enterprise both at home and overseas was a challenge in their efforts to diffuse biblical knowledge. In response, evangelicals opened their Bibles to understand and interpret the plurality of languages. They found the image of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) useful to interpret the phenomenon. Translating the Bible into various languages was their strategy to “unbabel the babel.”<sup>74</sup>

The zeal of evangelicals to translate, print, and circulate the Bible transcended denominational and national backgrounds. Modeled after the London Missionary Society, its parent body, the Religious Tract Society (RTS) founded in 1799 was an ecumenical venture, a rival to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge established by the Church of England.<sup>75</sup> Having received generous gifts from nonconformists and little support from the established church, the founders of the RTS pledged not to promote a single denomination. So did the BFBS, an offspring of the RTS. Founded in 1804, the BFBS assured its patrons that it would devote its resources merely to print and circulate Bibles in various languages and abstain from adding any marginal notes to the translations, lest such interpretation might promote the theological viewpoint of any particular denomination.<sup>76</sup>

Protestant missionaries outside the North Atlantic world, who found the distribution of Bibles indispensable to their Christianizing program, undertook translation projects with help of natives in mission situations. For example, with the help of his language teacher, Benjamin Schultze, a Danish-Halle missionary, translated the New Testament and portions of Hebrew Scripture into Telugu by 1732.<sup>77</sup> No later than 1821, the Serampore Mission in Bengal province had printed a Telugu version of the Bible. Meanwhile, the LMS missionaries, George Cran and Augustus Desgranges, relying on the expertise of Anandarayan, a Marathi Brahmin, started another translation of the Bible.<sup>78</sup> R. D. Johnston and J. W. Gordon completed the translation by 1854 and then revised the whole translation in the following three years.<sup>79</sup> James Dodds, a Scottish military officer in the British East India Company, in a letter to his mother in 1795, claimed to have started translating the Bible into Telugu.<sup>80</sup> Those three or four independent translation projects undertaken within the span of a century indicate the significance of Scripture in the Protestant missionary enterprise.

In order to circulate Bibles and scriptural portions, Protestant missionaries founded local auxiliaries of European and American Bible societies in their workplaces.<sup>81</sup> The Bible societies in the North Atlantic world, in turn, helped to fund the translation of the Bible in these parts of the world. Such partnerships between missionaries and Bible societies often crossed denominational barriers. For example, William Carey, a Baptist missionary in Bengal Presidency, received financial support from the BFBS.<sup>82</sup>

*Women and Religion in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*<sup>83</sup>  
With few opportunities in the public sphere, many middle-class women found careers in writing, nursing, and teaching. Some of

these professional writers produced religious literature and promoted mission, social change, and Bible work. For example, Hannah More—a proponent of women's education—and Ellen Ranyard, through stories and books, promoted the activities of the BFBS.<sup>84</sup> For women seeking some avenue of self-expression, local philanthropy, religious instruction, and foreign missions proved to be alternative realms of fulfillment.

Women's participation in religion flourished mostly among communities with evangelical convictions. An emphasis on universal sin and the experience of conversion reduced the gap between men and women. Further, a felt obligation to share one's religious experience with neighbors encouraged women to become preachers. As the nineteenth century dawned, nonconformist groups such as Methodists and Quakers allowed women to preach given their stress on lay ministries.<sup>85</sup> These opportunities for women, however, dwindled in the nonconformist communities toward the middle of the century, as they emulated the ministerial structures of the established church.

Even as these emerging evangelical groups, in their bid to find legitimacy, preferred professional male clergy to charismatic women preachers, the Church of England recognized the need for women's ministries.<sup>86</sup> According to Lillian Shiman, the Census of 1851, which found many of the English absent from their Anglican pews, awakened the established church. Intent on bringing the masses back to church, the male clergy engaged most laity as readers in worship and supported various social ameliorative reforms.<sup>87</sup> An inadequate number of priests and the gap between the ministers and the absenting masses necessitated greater participation from the laity.<sup>88</sup> The eagerness of women and the need for lay participation thus opened more opportunities for women in the Church of England. The male bureaucrats in the church may well have perceived women as the "main bulwark" against the spread of evangelical churches, as Shiman argues.<sup>89</sup>

Women, for their part, persuasively sought and found legitimacy for their ministry in Scripture, which their evangelical brothers had elevated to be authoritative. The writings of Florence Nightingale, who popularized the profession of nursing in England, illustrate the skill and zeal with which many women read and interpreted the Bible to justify the ministry of women within and outside the church. Nightingale, who earlier wanted to create women's orders modeled after Catholic religious orders, traced the origins of the ministry of women to the apostolic church. Referring to the office of deaconess in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Letter to the Romans, she argued that the ministry of women is divinely sanctioned.<sup>90</sup> Identifying

several periods in the history of Christianity when women exercised religious leadership, Nightingale reasoned that God had called women to serve the church and provided opportunities for their ministry.<sup>91</sup> Why did the leadership of women not flourish despite their interest and God's call, she asked. The lack of "nursery-grounds" (training), according to Nightingale, was the cause of its eventual demise.<sup>92</sup> The visits of Nightingale in 1850 and 1851 to Kaiserwerth, where Theodor Fliedner, a Lutheran minister, trained deaconesses, might have informed her diagnosis of and cure for the problem.<sup>93</sup> Nightingale, who construed nursing as a religious vocation, famously organized a group of nurses during the Crimean War.

Meanwhile, in the Church of England, several religious orders for women had emerged since the 1840s. Finding a model for women's ministry in the Catholic tradition, for example, E. B. Pusey founded a women's order and administered vows to Marian Hughes in 1841.<sup>94</sup> He organized a community of sisters in London four years later. Pusey collaborated with Priscilla Sellon in establishing the order in Davenport in 1848. The sisters in this order served the sick struck by the cholera epidemic of 1849 in the city. Branching out to adjacent cities, these orders established schools and worked in hospitals.<sup>95</sup> Their vow of celibacy and pledge to live in secluded communities was an affront to existing gender expectations within Anglicanism. Hence, they were accused of destroying social systems and severing family ties.<sup>96</sup>

Having recognized a need for the office of deaconess, Archibald Tait, the bishop of London, who later was promoted to be the Archbishop of Canterbury, consecrated Elizabeth K. Ferard the first deaconess in the Church of England in 1862. Ferard had earlier attended the training institute at Kaiserwerth. Tait then founded a community of sisters under her leadership in 1863.<sup>97</sup> Another group of deaconesses gathered at Mildmay under the leadership of William Pennefather in 1870.<sup>98</sup> According to Heeney, there were 95 centers affiliated to 18 Anglican sisterhoods by 1875.<sup>99</sup>

Women could also serve the Church of England either as voluntary district visitors or as professional parish visitors.<sup>100</sup> In 1860, Caroline J. Talbot instituted the Church of England ministerial office of parochial mission worker, attached to its parish structure.<sup>101</sup> These parochial workers and parish visitors assisted priests in preparing congregation members for the sacraments, providing religious instruction in homes, and reporting to male clergy the pastoral needs of their communicants.

Later in the century, the Church Army founded by Wilson Carlile in 1882 provided women with another avenue of service. An Anglican equivalent of the Salvation Army, the Church Army started a women's branch in 1887.<sup>102</sup> Like many other women's societies of the day, this female "army" engaged in visiting and nursing the sick. They organized mothers' meetings on a periodic basis, providing maternal tips while teaching literacy to women.

The issue about whether a woman should be active in religious affairs was less contentious than the one about the boundaries of her services. Evangelical women, even those who worked within the religious establishment, continued to perceive the home as the primary realm of their influence. Creating a boundary between the nuclear family and the world beyond, they presented themselves as moral influences and participated in the public sphere through their husbands and sons.

The question posed by S. A. J. in 1848 illustrates the attitude of many women and men of the mid-nineteenth-century England.<sup>103</sup> Her question, "In what way can wives and mothers best promote the revival of piety in the church?" presupposes the following answers: (i) Women can participate in the life of the church; and (ii) Women could revive the interest of the masses in religion as mothers and wives. In her essay published in the *British Mothers' Magazine*, S. A. J. characterized the "domestic circle" as a God-given sphere for women and that women should provide religious leadership only within their household.<sup>104</sup> To put it in the words of Sarah Austin, a proponent of district visiting, working within homes is practically "comfortable," socially "normal," and morally "good" for women.<sup>105</sup>

The emphasis on separate spheres and the willingness of women to confine their influence to the domestic realm found indubitable support from male clergy. Using a horticultural image, John A. James, a nonconformist minister in Birmingham, in a sermon preached in the 1850s, likened women to plants in a greenhouse. According to James, like a plant that will put forth all its "brilliant colors" and "sweet perfume" in "greenhouse seclusion," women could exercise their religious authority only at home.<sup>106</sup> Women, he cautioned, would fail just like a flower removed from its own floral home loses its beauty and odor in the "common garden," if they leave the protection of home.<sup>107</sup> According to James, the open field or the common garden (public sphere) is not lifeless but it was conducive only for "hardier flowers" (men).<sup>108</sup> Women, according to James, were not fit for pulpit, judiciary, or academia, as these horizons were part of the

open field. James drew legitimacy for his two-sphere theory and his conclusion that women were not fit for an active life outside the home from “reason” and Christianity.<sup>109</sup>

British evangelical women, by and large, did not transgress the domestic sphere. Nor did they demand equality with men or complete emancipation.<sup>110</sup> Instead, they subtly extended the horizons of their influence beyond their households and quietly impacted the moral fabric of their society. They visited the homes of others with Bibles, seeking to embody benevolence. They devoted their missionary and philanthropic energies to women and children both in England and overseas.<sup>111</sup>

The attempts of middle-class women to live out their faith found sympathizers among their working-class sisters. The latter shared some of the convictions and strategies of the middle-class women. Without overtly challenging the class boundaries, together they altered popular perceptions of women’s roles and found in religion an avenue for self-expression. The Biblewomen drawn from the poor of urban England epitomize this complex association between the two groups.

### Origins of the Profession in London

The emergence of the office dates back to the recruitment of Marian Bowers, a working-class woman of Irish descent from London, as a Biblewoman on June 10, 1857. Having converted to evangelical Christianity from Catholicism, Bowers approached George W. McCree of the City Mission, offering to introduce her newly found faith to her neighbors in St. Giles, a district in the city of London.

We do not have any knowledge about Marian Bowers except through the writings of Ellen Ranyard.<sup>112</sup> According to Ranyard’s narration, Bowers grew up in the Seven Dials, a slum in the east end of London. Like others in her working-class neighborhood, she earned her livelihood by cutting fire papers, molding wax flowers, and making bags for silversmiths. As might be expected of an evangelical writer in this period, Ranyard blamed the ill-fortunes of Bowers on her father’s excessive drinking. Ranyard located the early life of Bowers in the “rockeries” of St. Giles, a neighborhood where migrants of various creeds and confessions lived. Bowers herself was a church-going Catholic. Growing up an orphan, she lodged with an “atheist,” who taught her to read.

According to Ranyard, it was this ability to read that connected Bowers to the worldview of evangelicals who were distributing Bibles

in her neighborhood. Bowers's interest in the Bible started in 1853 when she heard a preacher reciting verses from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Despite being cautioned by her "atheist" tutor against reading the Bible, Bowers borrowed a Bible from the library that the BFBS had just started in the neighborhood. She read some biblical passages and remained in conversation with evangelical visitors. During a personal crisis caused by her husband's illness as well as her own, Bowers found solace in reading the Bible, which she called a "balm" to all sorrows.<sup>113</sup> Driven by the "arrow of conviction," Bowers, in a letter to McCree, offered spare a "portion" from the "treasure of time" to help ailing and needy women in her neighborhood.<sup>114</sup>

In her letter, which eventually led to the beginning of the ministerial office of Biblewoman, Bowers reminded McCree about her early contacts with him and related her conversion experience, highlighting especially the role of Scripture in her conversion. After politely expressing gratitude for the care provided to her during her sickness, she talked about the divine mercy that healed her "wounds" that no human surgeon could have cured.<sup>115</sup> Benevolence, according to her, was a fitting expression of gratitude to the merciful God whom she "offended."<sup>116</sup> She found potential beneficiaries of her benevolence in her neighborhood. Drawing her reader's attention to the "filthy" plight of her "poor outcast" neighbors, Bowers then argued that only a "female hand" could rectify the disorder. She claimed that, having grown up in the district and so aware of their needs, she was better equipped and situated to help her neighbors, either by taking a sick woman who had "none to help" to a hospital, or by "winning" an "erring sister" back to "virtue," or by helping a young child get to school.<sup>117</sup>

The letter of offer nowhere refers to the circulation of Bibles. In a second letter, also described in Ranyard, which we can characterize as an acceptance letter to a job offer, there is a change in tone. While the first letter manifests her broad philanthropic impulses, the second hints at her willingness to circulate Bibles. We can infer that there was a meeting of Bowers with McCree and/or one of his BFBS colleagues, probably Ranyard, in which McCree and Ranyard suggested a change of "path."<sup>118</sup> Bowers carefully assuaged the fears that a male missionary or a middle-class woman might have had at the possibility of her becoming a preacher. She recognized obstacles of "sin" in her ability to be a glad messenger of the Bible. She then assured McCree that she would not trespass any class barriers, considering herself unworthy of doing the "most menial service in a gentleman's house."<sup>119</sup> Subtly, Bowers also constructed a position of

authority based on her religious convictions. Claiming strength from divine grace and authority of God, “the Author of the blessed Book,” she declared the preaching of the Word of God to be her errand. She had not completely set aside her original agenda, which was to care for needy women, send children to school, and fight against alcoholism.<sup>120</sup> After careful negotiations, Bowers started her work on the 10th of June, 1857. Visiting houses and meeting women in St. Giles, she introduced herself as a “Bible-woman,” adopting the title from the “Bible men” who then were selling Bibles and scriptural portions both in England and abroad.<sup>121</sup>

The idea of a woman vendor, residing in the neighborhood, with greater access to poor urban women, attracted the BFBS. The male bureaucrats of the BFBS, which predominantly was patronized by urban middle-class women, eagerly welcomed the idea. Ranyard arranged for Bowers to be put on the payroll of the BFBS, emulating the pattern already used for urban parish workers in the Church of England. Eventually, having watched Bowers at work for three months and observing her ability to circulate Scriptures, Ranyard founded the London Bible and Domestic Female Mission (LBDFM) and recruited several other working-class women as Biblewomen.

Through the LBDFM, Ranyard provided structure and continuity to the nascent movement. She appointed voluntary superintendents, also called Bible Ladies or Pioneers, as intermediaries between the Biblewomen and LBDFM. Bible Ladies paid salaries to the Biblewomen, administered self-help programs, and sometimes conducted mother’s meetings.<sup>122</sup> Mothers’ meetings occasioned the reading and interpretation of the biblical passages.<sup>123</sup> With her experience in Bible circulation, Ranyard trained the new recruits at the Mission House, as they “marked, learned, and inwardly digested” her rendering of Scripture.<sup>124</sup> She served as the liaison between the BFBS and the Biblewomen in securing salaries and supplies.<sup>125</sup>

Ranyard also marketed the notion of woman colporteurs through her book *The Missing Link, or the Bible-Women in the Homes of the London Poor*, a compilation of articles from a monthly magazine of the same title. Describing the dire conditions then prevalent in the slums of urban England, she claimed that Biblewomen had better access to women in the poorer neighborhoods. Ranyard related stories that highlighted the challenges found in reaching the women of these neighborhoods and illustrated how her Biblewomen found ready welcome in these homes. Her comparison of the horrible conditions and the transformative results of Biblewomen’s services highlighted the need for this ministry.

Like many of her evangelical contemporaries, Ranyard believed in the centrality of the Bible and the importance of personal conversion in the spiritual life of an individual. Helping the needy help themselves, according to her, was an appropriate expression of evangelical philanthropy. Ranyard, the daughter of an affluent cement maker, was born in 1809 at Nine Elms, a district in London.<sup>126</sup> A series of evangelical revivals, which swept through many English churches in the first half of the nineteenth century, did not leave her family unaffected. Ranyard, who befriended other girls with evangelical convictions, experienced “conversion” when she was 16.<sup>127</sup> A stroll in the slums of Manchester with her friend Elizabeth then ignited in her a passion to work among the poor.<sup>128</sup> She identified human sin as the source of all social problems and advocated reading the Bible and the subsequent conversion of individuals as remedies.

Ranyard, who joined the BFBS in 1829 as Bible Collector,<sup>129</sup> earned considerable influence within the organization, which was mostly patronized by urban middle-class women but was controlled by male bureaucrats.<sup>130</sup> (Bible Collectors helped the Bible societies in collecting donations for the printing of Bibles, as well as in circulating the printed copies.) Ranyard’s literary and organizational skills advanced her standing in the organization. The jubilee celebrations of the BFBS occasioned her rise to prominence. Commissioned by Thomas Phillips, secretary of the Jubilee Committee, Ranyard wrote a commemorative volume, *The Book and Its Story*, wherein she surveyed the publication history of the Bible. She did not disappoint her employers. In keeping with the occasion, she portrayed the translation and circulation work of the BFBS as the realization of biblical prophecies.<sup>131</sup>

Responses to her literary work illustrate the place Ranyard occupied both within the BFBS and in the popular imagination. In addition to a grant of 100 pounds as honorarium, Thomas Phillips, the Jubilee Secretary, added a compelling preface to the book.<sup>132</sup> The book received unambiguous acclamation from the general reader. Within the period of 30 years, it had been reprinted 11 times in Britain and the United States. The production of around 100,000 copies in three decades indicates the place Ranyard occupied in the popular imagination; it also reveals the ideological inclinations of the masses. Ranyard was at the apex of her popularity when she wrote the book *The Missing Link, or Bible-Women in the Homes of the London Poor*, in which she introduced the concept of Biblewoman.

Working-class women showed considerable interest in the profession. Within a year of its inception, five more Biblewomen joined the movement. They worked in Paddington, Clerkenwell (London’s Little

Italy), Grey's Inn Lane, Somer's Town, and Westminster. The number of Biblewomen rose to 36 in two years. The Annual Reports of the BFBS state that there were more than 200 Biblewomen by 1863, just six years after the appointment of Bowers.<sup>133</sup> Waves of revivals at the end of the decade may have spurred its rapid growth.<sup>134</sup>

### **The London Bible Domestic Female Mission and Its Salient Features**

An emphasis on Scripture, as well as a willingness to live amidst the target groups, set the office of Biblewoman apart from other contemporary women's ministries. The following traits marked the movement up to 1879, the year Ranyard died.

#### *“Native Reformers of their Own Class”*

The Biblewomen were local. They hailed from the districts they served and resided in them or within a reasonable distance from them.<sup>135</sup> The idea of operating within the boundaries of a postal zone was not new. District visitors in various philanthropic agencies worked within marked boundaries. But employing women from the community they would serve later was an innovation. The office of parochial mission worker adopted this pattern. The LBDFM rarely transferred women to another locale. These occasional transfers were made only when a Biblewoman did not “fit” in the place of her earlier appointment.<sup>136</sup>

Biblewomen were both identical with and different from the neighbors they served. Like those around them, most of the early Biblewomen had migrated to England from other European countries, lured by the mirage of benefits from industrialization and the British colonial enterprise. At the same time, Biblewomen differed from their neighbors with regard to cultural values and faith convictions. To put it in Ranyard's words, they had “risen up” to be different from their “poor outcast” neighbors.<sup>137</sup> “Rising up” involved conversion from Catholic or Reformed traditions to evangelicalism. Economically, Biblewomen earned more than their neighbors. In addition to previous earnings, “moderate” wages from the BFBS on a regular basis could double their income.<sup>138</sup> Additional shillings would not have transformed a working-class Biblewoman into a middle-class Bible Lady, but they would have certainly improved her economic condition.

Hailing from a community and being geographically located in it served several purposes. First, their residence in the neighborhood provided Biblewomen continuous access to the families they

served. It made them available to their subscribers around the clock, although they were remunerated for just a few hours a week. For example, Bowers worked while “sitting still to rest” at home.<sup>139</sup>

Second, by virtue of being natives, Biblewomen began their work with the trust of the community already in hand. They brought credibility to the evangelical message, which their neighbors might have resented at first sight. This credibility was essential in the work of Biblewomen, as they had to sell Bibles and collect money on a regular basis. The BFBS wanted familiar saleswomen whom a costumer would readily “trust” and invest her “pence.”<sup>140</sup> The RTS had, three decades earlier, preferred to employ “strangers” to arouse the curiosity of the customers in the tracts they marketed.<sup>141</sup> Trust was less needed then as the business relationship ended in one transaction.

Third, belonging to the community gave the Biblewomen insight into the local culture. Biblewomen were familiar with the “habits and mode of life” of the communities they served.<sup>142</sup> They were aware of the special needs of the community.<sup>143</sup> Or they could at least claim such knowledge. For example, Bowers claimed insight into the needs of her district and offered evangelical Christianity as a remedy. Presenting herself “as poor as” her clients were, she offered them the Bible as a “balm” to their “sorrows.”<sup>144</sup>

Fourth, familiarity with the location made traversing the streets easier, as the work of Biblewomen required them to visit houses. Biblewomen traveled across neighborhoods and visited houses, looking for potential subscribers or patients. Some of them visited 40–60 families per day.<sup>145</sup>

Fifth, modeling or “ensampling” the new culture they promoted was an essential part of the Biblewomen’s job.<sup>146</sup> Biblewomen had Saturday and Sunday off with their families while nurses could spend their Sundays at home.<sup>147</sup> Taking a day or two off from their work not only introduced the practice of Sabbath-keeping but also highlighted the importance of time with family. Evangelical piety not only meant the acceptance of certain faith convictions and the experience of interior moments of personal piety but also included a set of social practices. Demonstrating the values and practices of evangelicals would have been possible only by living among the subscribers.

Above all, dislocation from their communities would have undermined the nature of their work as a “link” between two worldviews.<sup>148</sup> By remaining in their neighborhoods, the British Biblewoman functioned as bridge-builders between evangelical preachers and the immigrant communities of urban England. They were “native reformers of their own class,” as Ranyard characterized them.<sup>149</sup>

*Bible-Peddlers?*

Dissemination of biblical literacy was the primary task of Biblewomen. Like their namesakes, the “Bible men” of the BFBS, Biblewomen sold Bibles and Scripture portions. Alternative job titles, such as Bible Missionary or Scripture Reader attest to the importance given to Scripture in the movement.<sup>150</sup>

It is this emphasis on the Bible that distinguished Biblewomen from Lutheran deaconesses at Kaiserwerth and Roman Catholic nuns. According to Ranyard, Bible work was the “peculiar” and “Protestant” mark of Biblewomen.<sup>151</sup> Identifying similarities and dissimilarities of Biblewomen with Catholic nuns, Ranyard underlined the potential of women in religious affairs. Like her evangelical contemporaries in the Church of England, such as Florence Nightingale, she reminded the male clergy in her tradition to learn from the Roman Catholic Church, which, according to her, wisely recognized the potential and utilized the services of women.<sup>152</sup> While commanding their “self-denying” services, Ranyard, informed by her evangelical convictions, criticized Catholic nuns for not teaching the Bible. Using images from a war narrative in the Hebrew Scriptures, she blamed them for not having a “lamp” in their “pitchers.”<sup>153</sup> Ranyard borrowed this imagery from the seventh chapter of the Book of Judges. According to Ranyard, Catholics committed the “great and vital mistake” of keeping Scripture “away from all those whom they find opportunity to influence.”<sup>154</sup> Ranyard insisted that Biblewomen carried Bibles in their bags. Biblewomen sold more than 7000 copies of the Scriptures within the first year and half.<sup>155</sup> To make Bibles and portions affordable, they collected a penny every day or week from those who could not afford to pay more.<sup>156</sup>

In this period, the BFBS, whose primary mission was to translate, print, and circulate copies or portions of the Bible, paid the salaries of Biblewomen for the express purpose of making Bibles available to the poorest segments of English society.<sup>157</sup> It supplied the Bibles and Scripture portions that the Biblewomen sold, and allowed them to keep a part of the sale as their salary. According to the agreement between the BFBS and LBDFM, which Ranyard added as an appendix to her book, the BFBS would pay a Biblewoman “only” (stated twice in upper case in a single sentence) for the time she engaged in “selling Bibles.”<sup>158</sup> The insistence of the BFBS on “selling” may have been to restrain Biblewomen from interpreting Scriptures, in accordance with its policy of not adding a note or comment. This restriction might have also aimed at alerting the LBDFM that the BFBS was not responsible for any philanthropic work as it was not a part of their

mission. The BFBS insisted that any other work that Biblewomen undertook remained secondary to their Bible work, advising Ranyard to “carefully draw and faithfully adhere” to the “line of separation between Bible work and the work of the Social Mission.”<sup>159</sup>

A shared belief in the centrality of Scripture for Christian piety was the key factor that connected women of middle-class and working-class backgrounds. With respect to this work, Howsam argues, evangelicals in mid-nineteenth century England were making a new connection with the urban working class just when industrialization was creating and alienating this social segment. The BFBS, through its recruitment of the Biblewomen and the sale of Bibles among the poor, no doubt converted this connection into a commercial one.<sup>160</sup> Its marketing needs warranted the forging of a network of social relations on a retail basis. But to argue, as Peter Wosh does in his study of the American Bible Society, that profit motive was the only driving force behind the forging of these connections can be problematic.<sup>161</sup> In my view, the spreading of religious feelings and experiences was just as important as profit, as it was in the case of the RTS.<sup>162</sup> The voluntary agents and donors (investors) of the BFBS were spurred by a theological conviction that Scripture when made available is capable of regenerating individuals and transforming societies.

The following beliefs served to bring the British Biblewomen and their middle-class employers together regardless of class barriers: (i) The moral and intellectual improvement of society rests on the spiritual and interior regeneration of individuals;<sup>163</sup> (ii) Salvation of an individual soul is possible only through faith in Christ; (iii) Conversion, an interior experience of an individual, results in social transformation, which, in turn, supports the regenerated; (iv) Faith in Christ and the conversion of an individual begins with reading the Bible; and (v) Every converted individual has an obligation to draw others to the experience of personal conversion.

While there may not have been many disagreements over the centrality of Scripture between the Biblewomen and their employers, there were differences over what to do or not do with the Bible. As mentioned earlier, the BFBS expected Biblewomen to sell Bibles and, when needed, read scriptural portions to their subscribers. But the British Biblewomen did more with the Bible than what their employers expected. As noted earlier, Bowers had brought her own agenda to the new job. In her acceptance letter, Bowers proposed to “read” and also “explain,” as far as she could, the scriptural texts.<sup>164</sup> She refused to be a mute peddler, merely distributing the scriptural portions and collecting money. Bowers instead preferred to be an active interpreter

of the texts, a role that could irk both donors and the clergy. While not prohibiting the practice, Ranyard was careful to restate the official policy of the BFBS, perhaps to assuage the fears of the latter.

*Centered around the Home*

As improving the temporal conditions of the urban masses was one of the stated aims of the LBDFM, the vending bag of Biblewomen carried cloths and soup in addition to Bibles.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, the social aspect of the Biblewomen's ministry in particular marked them apart from their male colleagues in the BFBS. Since Biblewomen viewed the home as the primary sphere of female influence, many of their social activities had the domestic realm as their locus. Borrowing the practice of visiting houses from district visitors, Biblewomen visited women in their homes.<sup>166</sup> During their visitations, Biblewomen provided advice, often unsolicited, to women on domestic affairs and tips on how to spend money. They taught and demonstrated how to keep children clean, prepare food, clean windows and floors, and keep beds.<sup>167</sup> Biblewomen taught working-class women the use of the "basin," "soup," and "combs."<sup>168</sup> They discouraged men from alcoholism.

Consistent with her letter of offer, Bowers engaged in several philanthropic activities. She organized a Clothing and Bedding Club in her neighborhood in the first year of her appointment.<sup>169</sup> She sold beds, collecting a penny per day from her subscribers, a practice her junior colleagues continued. Bowers and her colleagues stitched clothes and marketed them.<sup>170</sup> While the circulation of Bibles reveals the Biblewomen's belief in the centrality of the Bible in an individual's spiritual life, the stress on beds and clean clothes epitomizes their recognition that an individual's piety, which is interior and spiritual, needs to be supported by peculiarly evangelical practices. These practices, they held, were the natural outcomes and symptoms of one's interior change. The belief that certain social practices, such as keeping homes clean and exercising frugality, are integral to an evangelical lifestyle was not unique to British evangelical women. Mary Lyon, the founder of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, likewise introduced in her academy a regime wherein keeping the rooms clean and frugality were construed to be essential to evangelical piety.<sup>171</sup>

In resonance with the contemporary "polite" culture of the middle class that encouraged reading circles and tea parties, Biblewomen hosted weekly mothers' meetings.<sup>172</sup> Often meeting in the early part of an afternoon, they taught or read a Bible lesson, offered a prayer,

and sang a hymn.<sup>173</sup> These parties also served as occasions for business transactions between the Biblewomen and their subscribers.

Fulfilling the original offer of Bowers, the Biblewomen also worked among sick women. It was out of this commitment to the sick among poor women that a separate wing specializing in nursing emerged. Described by Ranyard as the “second missing link,” Biblewomen-nurses cared for ailing women. They sought admission for the sick to the hospitals.<sup>174</sup> Given the need for medical care in London slums and the interest of some Biblewomen, Ranyard selected a few and sent them to learn the basics of nursing in Guy’s Hospital, London. The process of training became more formal from 1868.<sup>175</sup> Every recruit was required to do three months of Bible work before proceeding to undertake the nurse training. They then apprenticed for three months in hospitals and infirmaries during which period they were placed under the supervision of a Nurse-Pioneer, an administrative link between the trainee and the LBDFM.<sup>176</sup>

Ranyard outlined the ideological basis for this “second arm” of the movement in her book *Nurses for the Needy or Bible-Women Nurses in the Homes of the London Poor*.<sup>177</sup> Highlighting the miseries and the need for medical care among the London poor, she claimed that Biblewomen-nurses were doubly qualified to engage in nursing, on account of their gender as well as class. As women, they were endowed with gifts necessary for nursing.<sup>178</sup> According to Ranyard, the ability to care is a feminine gift accessible to women of all classes.<sup>179</sup> Further, Biblewomen-nurses, by virtue of being poor, possessed a special sensitivity to care for their own class, she believed. The body needs to be cared for “as well as” the soul, as “human souls live in bodies.”<sup>180</sup> Thus, caring for physical needs was integral to an evangelical spirituality of “going about and doing good.”<sup>181</sup>

Affluent and middle-class women contributed to the movement with donations. With these gifts and bequests, Ranyard purchased medical supplies and stored them in the Mission Houses, which were also warehouses for Bibles and beds. The donation of a house by J. A. Calder, a prominent donor, made possible the storage of medical supplies and a location for periodic meetings of the nurses.<sup>182</sup>

These two arms of the movement grew quickly. Within seven years of its origins, the nursing wing attracted 78 women.<sup>183</sup> Despite clearly defined distinctions, Biblewomen did not completely ignore the sick nor did Biblewomen-nurses refrain from religious instruction. While discouraging Biblewomen-nurses from mere “preaching,” Ranyard reminded them that they should seek the “right moment” to “quietly teach” while serving their patients.<sup>184</sup>

*Women's Work among Women*

The ministry of the Biblewomen was women's work among women. As mentioned earlier, women of evangelical convictions sought and created many avenues of self-expression within the church. They engaged in pastoral care, religious education, nursing, foreign missions, and social reforms. Women and children had been the focus of their ministries.

This focus on women emerged alongside a view that women were capable of religious leadership and moral influence. According to Ranyard, there is a church in every house with mother as its religious head.<sup>185</sup> By being a moral influence at home, women could contribute to the amelioration of social problems. Quoting Proverbs 28, a supporter of the Biblewomen's movement reasoned that "a man is what a woman makes him."<sup>186</sup> Thus, not only the founder of the movement but also her employees and patrons believed that effective solutions to domestic problems and those of society lay in women.

The participation of Biblewomen and parochial mission women in these activities attests to the fact that the philanthropy of women was not merely a middle-class enterprise aimed at creating and imposing their culture on the "heathen" at home and abroad, as Twells argues.<sup>187</sup> These missionary and ameliorative activities had active collaborators within the working class. Evangelical convictions caused and sustained this alliance across the class distinctions. However, this collaboration neither sought to blur class boundaries nor did it challenge the restriction of women to the domestic sphere.

*A Ministerial Office*

As noted earlier, the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of several women's orders in the Church of England. The office of deaconess was restored and that of parochial mission woman was created. The institution of Biblewoman did not radically differ from the kind of activities that these other church workers engaged in. Like their sisters in the other ministerial offices, Biblewomen visited homes, focused on women, provided religious instruction, cared for physical needs, and guided the absenting masses to church. The office of Biblewoman, however, diverged from its sister institutions by not officially identifying itself with a denominational body or parish.

The practice of working independent of established church structures was in resonance with the ecumenical spirit of many missionary and reform societies, such as the CMS and the RTS, which had originated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>188</sup> Although the office did not identify itself with a single denomination,

it served the Protestant church more broadly through its evangelistic activities and by guiding its beneficiaries to local churches. An initial commitment to avoid the dominance of ecclesiastical hierarchies eventually died with Ranyard in 1879, when Anglican parish priests took over the supervisory roles.<sup>189</sup>

At its inception, the clergy in the Church of England doubted the credentials of the new ministerial order, as it bypassed already existing offices within the church. William P. Wood, an Anglican priest who patronized the office of parochial mission worker, had no qualms with the notion of native women preachers abroad nor did he doubt the ability of women to diffuse biblical knowledge in urban England.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, he questioned the legitimacy of this agency for working outside the existing ecclesiastical structures to which, according to him, “the Apostles and prophets” laid the foundation.<sup>191</sup> The office of parochial mission woman established in 1860, Wood claimed, rectified this shortcoming through its affiliation to the Church of England. According to Wood, the institution of mission women “fits” best into existing parish structures.<sup>192</sup>

For its part, the BFBS was careful to assure potential critics that the emerging office of Biblewoman would not undermine the importance of the ordained ministry nor would it impinge on the ministry of preaching that many clergy thought was their sole prerogative. A sermon preached on May 6, 1884, by Edward C. Glyn, vicar of Kinsington and a chaplain in ordinary to the Queen, provides further insight into the debate over the emergence of this ministry.<sup>193</sup>

Seeking to defend the efforts of the BFBS, Glyn, in the first half of the sermon, gracefully acknowledged the criticism against the Bible society that it was promoting “bibliolatry” or the worship of Scripture.<sup>194</sup> The BFBS was accused of “underrating” the “efficacy and worth” of the ordained ministry. According to the critics, by its emphasis on Scripture and its diffusion, the BFBS was “deprecating” God’s other means of grace. The second half of the sermon listed the activities of Biblewomen around the world and defended the relationship of the BFBS with this new form of ministry. By asserting that the BFBS “respects and supports all forms of living agency,” Glyn, an Anglican minister, reminded his auditors that ordained ministry was not the only form of ministry and that God was capable of working outside it.<sup>195</sup> He then assured them that the BFBS restricted its employees to selling of the scriptural portions and prohibited them from adding a note or exposition in the process. The efforts of the Society, he concluded, neither threatened nor “undervalued” the existing ministerial work of the church but rather contributed to it.

Meanwhile, Biblewomen did not lag behind in their efforts to placate the clergy. Like women parish workers and mission women, they remained subordinate to the male priests. After reading and explaining the Scriptures, they encouraged their listeners to visit a church and seek guidance from a male minister. There were also occasions when Biblewomen invited a male priest to their cottage meetings. An example is provided in the rare autobiography of Mrs. Collier, a Biblewoman in Birmingham, England, from 1859 to 1879. According to this narrative, Biblewomen, who often took the liberty of reading and explaining scriptural passages, occasionally invited their male pastors to the women's gathering in their districts.<sup>196</sup> This practice of inviting pastors to women's cottage meetings may have been followed to assure skeptics that the Biblewomen looked up to ordained ministers for the preaching of the Word and were not creating an alternative power structure.

Emerging amid many other women's ministries in 1857, the office of Biblewoman drew its personnel from the working class. It augmented the centrality of Scripture in Christian life. Focusing on women and children, Biblewomen visited homes, sought conversions, and promoted cultural changes. In the due course, Protestant missionaries in the Northern Circars would transport the office to coastal Andhra. As recounted in the next two chapters, Telugu Biblewomen, who inherited a pre-Christian tradition of leading their families and communities in some matters of religion from their own culture, additionally appropriated the practices of native agency, Bible-reading, house visiting, and social activism from their British counterparts.

## THE MEETING OF TWO WORLDS IN ONE OFFICE: 1880–1921

Telugu women, who were already active in the religious affairs of their communities, carried over their traditional cultic leadership roles into the new religion. The office of Biblewoman, which Protestant missionaries imported from Britain, offered them opportunities for their service and authority. A series of Dalit conversions to Christianity, the feminization of the Protestant missions, and changes in cultural landscape of Telugu society in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century together shaped how the profession evolved in the Northern Circars. In this chapter, I will analyze the process of appropriation of the office in the region, especially in regard to its practices and features.

### ORIGINS OF THE OFFICE AMONG THE TELUGUS

References to the work of Telugu Biblewoman in missionary literature began to surface in the late 1870s. There were certainly more than one Biblewoman active by 1880. The changes in the social fabric of Telugu Christianity, the outlook of the Protestant missionary enterprise, and the social dynamics of women's access to women shaped the evolution of the profession.

### Dalitization of Telugu Christianity

It is appropriate to recall how the series of Dalit conversions to Christianity began, before assessing its significance for Telugu Christianity and for the office of Biblewoman in particular. As noted in chapter 2, the religious conversions of Yerraguntla Periah, a Madiga from Tallakondapadu, and Nagamma, his wife, ignited a chain of group conversions of Madigas in Ongole. A leather worker

by occupation, Periah was a pious Rajayogi.<sup>1</sup> Tanning the skin of dead animals and making leather-based objects was the chief occupation of the Madigas. While visiting the Godavari region where he went to purchase leather, Periah heard about Christianity from Madiga Christians in Palakollu the earliest group of Dalits to convert to Christianity.<sup>2</sup> On his way back, he visited Vongolu Abraham, a relative in Eluru, who introduced him to F. N. Alexander, a CMS missionary. Advised by Alexander, Periah returned home to be baptized by American Baptist missionaries instead of seeking baptism in Eluru.<sup>3</sup> The principle of comity, which demarcated territorial boundaries between missionaries of various societies in order to use personnel efficiently, reduce the duplication of activities, and avert competition, might have been a reason for Alexander's advice.

Returning home, Periah introduced the new religion to his fellow Madigas in Tallakondapadu. Having decided together to convert to Christianity, Periah, with a group of "twenty to thirty believers," invited American Baptist missionaries to their village.<sup>4</sup> Baptized in 1866, the new converts traversed Madiga hamlets in their neighboring villages, introducing Christianity to their relatives.

Subsequently, a series of "whole village" conversions followed.<sup>5</sup> A "whole village" conversion does not mean the Christianization of an entire village or a neighborhood by decision of a single headman.<sup>6</sup> Small groups and clusters of families received baptism at separate times and at their choice. The second tide of conversions took place in 1878 when a multitude of Madigas stormed the mission bungalow in Ongole and demanded that John E. Clough baptize them. Clough, who initially doubted their motives, yielded to the Madigas' pressure. With the help of Clough, native preachers baptized thousands of Madigas in the summer. The 3,536 baptisms performed within the span of three days in the summer of 1878 indicate the enormity of the movement.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this second tide, the number of Christians in the Madras Presidency increased by 30 percent between 1871 and 1881. Christians in the Telugu speaking districts alone increased by 230 percent.<sup>8</sup> Christianity in the district of Nellore recorded a 590 percent growth rate, according to the official reports.<sup>9</sup> A third tide of Madiga conversions followed in the 1890s.

The disastrous famine of 1876–1878 partially contributed to these conversions. The month of July in 1878 when thousands of Madigas became Christians also marked the return of monsoon after two years of drought.<sup>10</sup> Earlier, the conversion of Madigas in Palakollu at the end of the 1840s and of Malas in Raghavapuram a decade later took place

right after extended periods of drought.<sup>11</sup> Periah, who triggered the conversion movement of Madigas in Ongole, heard about Christianity and decided to become a Christian during a famine when he visited Madiga Christians in Palakollu. The news about the abundance of dead animal carrion in the Godavari district lured Periah to the region in 1862. It is also probable that Dalits who often turned to goddesses in times of crisis for help may have doubted the ability of their deities because of the prolonged starvation.<sup>12</sup> The great famine of 1876–1878 certainly caused an alliance between Baptist missionaries, colonial administrators and Madigas. Madigas benefitted from this missionary-colonist nexus. Having secured grants from the Madras Presidency, Clough employed them at the construction of the Buckingham canal.<sup>13</sup> Clough and his Madiga collaborators supplied food and medicine to the starving Madigas. The role of nature in these conversions cannot completely be denied although Madigas indicated otherwise. Madigas collectively asserted that neither their association with Baptist missionaries nor their material needs factored in their decision to be baptized by seeking the baptismal rite after the famine had abated and by negotiating with a Roman Catholic priest for baptism when Clough doubted their motives.

Mass conversions of Madigas and the subsequent Dalit conversions changed the social fabric of Telugu Christianity. Until then, Kammas and Reddies in the region, which now is known as Rayalaseema, dominated the established Catholic communities. In the coastal districts, Eurasians and caste Christians filled the Protestant pews. Brahmin converts, such as Purushottam Choudhari, Pulipaka Jagannatham, and Manchala Ratnam, dominated the process of theologizing through their hymns and sermons.<sup>14</sup> In the aftermath of the Madiga conversions, Christianity among Telugus had at last been identified with Dalits.

The Dalit conversions also resulted in the feminization of Christianity in the region. Dalit Christians brought with them female preaching, which was a distinctive mark of Dalit religiosity. Itinerant preachers, such as Yerraguntla Nagamma, Periah's wife, and Bangarapu Satyamma, Thatiah's wife, traversed Madiga hamlets and introduced Christianity to their kin.<sup>15</sup> Local women such as Julia, Nagamma, and Lydia, shared leadership with missionary patrons and Madiga patriarchs.<sup>16</sup> The rapid expansion of the community offered women new opportunities for leadership, while also bringing into the Christian community several women capable of and interested in leading it.

## Feminization in the Missionary Movement

Across the oceans, interest among and opportunities for women in foreign mission increased in postbellum America. The creation of women's missionary societies in North America, the resurgence of Mite Societies, and the recruitment of single women as missionaries resulted in the "feminization" of the missionary force.<sup>17</sup>

As Patricia Hill argues, three factors in particular prepared these and other American women for foreign missions.<sup>18</sup> First, a greater number of American women had acquired the skills necessary to act publicly during the Civil War. While their men were away engaged in combat, women had led their families and communities. Female participation in the Abolition Movement also provided them with increased confidence and leadership skills. Relegated to home after the war, American women looked for opportunities to continue their participation in public life. Foreign missions provided an ideal opportunity to do this. Second, due to fewer household chores and decreased rates of pregnancies, women had more time for leisure and energy at their disposal. Third, the proliferation of female seminaries in the mid-nineteenth century provided more young women with educational opportunities. Many of these academies prepared their students specifically for foreign missions. As a result, in the decade following the Civil War, five Presbyterian, four Baptist, three Congregational and two Methodist women's mission boards were founded.<sup>19</sup> Across the border, Canadian women longed to emulate the mission activism of their American counterparts. According to Rosemary Gagan, a Canadian social historian, the absence of the "baptism of blood" that their American cousins underwent during the Civil War delayed Canadian women's interest in foreign mission by a decade, but it did arrive.<sup>20</sup>

The newly formed women's missionary societies began to send single women as missionaries to the Northern Circars. Lavinia Peabody, an alumna of Mount Holyoke Seminary, was the earliest single woman missionary among the Telugus.<sup>21</sup> She arrived in 1871, having been sent by the Women's Baptist Foreign Mission Society of the American Baptists as its pioneer missionary.<sup>22</sup> More single women arrived in the 1880s. The Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the American Lutheran General Synod, founded in 1879, sent Kate Boggs in 1881.<sup>23</sup> Anna S. Kugler, a medical missionary, joined her two years later. Meanwhile, the Women's Baptist Missionary Society in western Ontario was established in 1882. Mary Jane Frith, their first single woman missionary, arrived in Samarlakota the same year. The Women's Baptist

Mission Union of the Maritime Baptists was organized in 1884.<sup>24</sup> Back in the United States, the Women's Missionary Society of the Augustana Synod was formed in 1892.<sup>25</sup> Charlotte Swenson was its first single woman missionary.<sup>26</sup> She arrived in Rajahmundry in 1895. Even before many single women missionaries from organized mission societies had arrived, Ellen Folsom, an American single woman missionary, reached Kakinada as early as 1880.<sup>27</sup> She left her country as a "faith" missionary, unaffiliated with any organized mission agency, but eventually worked with Canadian Baptist missionaries.<sup>28</sup>

Relatively inexperienced, these single women missionaries needed local women in their efforts to Christianize Telugu communities. In turn, Telugu Christian women, seeking to lead their communities, came into contact with the Protestant missionary enterprise at just the time when it was becoming increasingly feminized both in terms of personnel and mission priorities.

### **A Confluence of Missionary Need and the Interests of Telugu Women**

Single women missionaries focused most of their energies on work among women. Their eagerness to work among women was due to their view of these native women. They understood Telugu women to be the citadels of native culture and thereby possible hurdles to their Christianizing program.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, they recognized the capacity of these women to engineer cultural changes. Therefore, they hoped that the conversion of Telugu women in particular could lead to the wholesale Christianization of the Telugus. In a bid to convert the hurdles into stepping stones, women missionaries sought the collaboration of native women.

There were other compelling practical reasons for missionary dependence on native women. First, women missionaries could not have access to native homes unless accompanied by a local woman.<sup>30</sup> Born outside the caste system and therefore considered defiling, missionaries could not find entrance into the local homes.<sup>31</sup> Given the typical dress code of the missionaries and their lack of jewelry, Telugu women, for their part, often mistook women missionaries to be men and thereby refused to welcome them until convinced otherwise by native women.<sup>32</sup> Because of their gender, even the most respected of the male preachers would not find easy access to native families, as Telugu customs restricted the interaction of women with men outside of the family. With no other option, missionaries depended on native women to earn entrance into native homes.<sup>33</sup> As was expected

of them, Telugu Biblewomen introduced new people to missionaries and served as interlocutors.

Second, Telugu women knew the geographical map and social landscape of their villages. They knew the subtle cultural codes of each neighborhood and how to approach a community.<sup>34</sup> Third, Telugu women were simply better equipped to survive the hot climate of Andhra than the missionaries. They were relatively immune to sunstroke and were aware of the tactics to withstand it. Fourth, the native women's command of the vernacular was crucial in introducing Christianity to the region. The Telugu language that missionaries learned from *munshis*, mostly Brahmins, was not intelligible to Dalits and Sudhras, even those who were receptive to the Christian message. Likewise, Muslim women were more comfortable speaking with women fluent in Urdu than with foreign missionaries.<sup>35</sup> Fifth, as in the case of China, missionaries realized that the family networks of their native women helpers would open doors for the preaching of the Christian message.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, employing native women was financially viable as well. Missionaries soon discovered that they could pay the least to women workers and accomplish the most with their help. A Biblewoman usually was paid five rupees per month. This was less than 5 percent of what a single woman missionary received and only one-third of what a male preacher earned. While male catechists who collaborated with American Lutheran missionaries received ten rupees per month in 1883, Biblewomen received between three and five rupees.<sup>37</sup> According to an 1883 report, Hariamma and Shanthamma together received 120 rupees per annum (CAD 46) while their employer Carrie Hammond, a Canadian Baptist, received the sum of 1300 rupees (CAD 500).<sup>38</sup>

Telugu Christian women needed missionary matrons not only to give them access to Western education and literary skills but also to legitimize their traditional leadership roles in the community. The girls' schools founded by missionaries provided them with skills to read. The professions of Biblewoman and zenana worker gave these women public roles through which they could exercise their religious authority.

### Cultural Reconfigurations within the Telugu Social Order

On the larger cultural landscape of Telugu society, the 1870s were marked by flux and fluidity. The colonial administration of the Madras Presidency, the native princes, and Hindu reformers made

concerted efforts to improve the status of women in Telugu society. They offered formal education to girls, discouraged the early marriage of girls, and advocated widow remarriage.

The sudden and dramatic upsurge of interest both to start and to attend girls' schools in the 1870s attests to this cultural change. According to John Leonard, a social historian, while there were 136 schools for girls in 1870 in the Madras Presidency, there were 546 by 1880.<sup>39</sup> In 1881 alone, 98 more schools were organized. Leonard holds Christian missionaries, colonial administration, local rajahs, and social reformers responsible for this surge.<sup>40</sup> The 1867 visit of Mary Carpenter, a British social activist, had prodded the colonial government to start schools designated for women's education.<sup>41</sup> Influenced by the ideology of Brahmo Samaj<sup>42</sup> and Western liberal thought, local princes started numerous schools for girls. For example, in 1868, the Maharajah of Pithapuram founded a girls' school in Kakinada with monthly and annual grants for its maintenance.<sup>43</sup> In the same year, the Maharajah of Vizianagaram founded one for Brahmin and Kshatriya girls in his capital. Earlier, the Pial schools, a system in which Brahmin tutors offered formal instruction on their verandahs in the early part of the century, permitted only boys to be educated.

In addition to offering education to girls, Brahmin dissenters such as Kandukuri Viresalingam and Gurajada Venkata Apparao, architects of the Telugu Renaissance, on their part, introduced reforms in the social customs of caste Hindus.<sup>44</sup> Under the influence of the Brahmo ideology, they advocated widow marriages and discouraged the early marriage of girls. While not abandoning the Hindu faith, they sought to reinterpret the Hindu Scriptures. The girls' schools the princes founded proved to be platforms where their ideas were communicated. For example, in 1879, Viresalingam lectured at Vizianagaram Girls' School, founded by the Maharajah, on the practice of widow marriage, which traditional Hindu propriety prohibited.<sup>45</sup>

The reforming programs of the Brahmin dissenters and Kshatriya rulers were focused on the elite. They aimed to elevate the social status of caste women, especially those of Brahmin origins.<sup>46</sup> According to Ramakrishna, a social historian, these reform movements offered an alternative to Christianity and thus served to check its spread, especially among caste Hindus.<sup>47</sup> By attending the schools and organizing themselves, caste women participated in these social reforms.

These reforms, confined to the caste communities, signaled changes in the dominant sections of Telugu culture. The schools established by missionaries often received girls from the social margins, although

missionaries made concerted efforts to enlist caste girls by establishing “caste schools” only for the latter. This new generation of literate women, who sought social and cultural changes, provided personnel for the profession.

### The Emergence of the Profession in Neighboring Regions

American missionaries of the Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist traditions had introduced the office with different designations in South India. Biblewomen at this period were called Bible or Scripture Readers. American Methodist missionaries, for example, employed native women as Bible Readers as early as 1861.<sup>48</sup> Margaret Mayou, a Reformed Church in America missionary, hired a Bible Reader in 1866 in Arnee, Tamilnadu.<sup>49</sup> American Baptists had appointed Lydia as a Bible Reader at least by 1870.<sup>50</sup> Jacob Chamberlain, a Reformed Church of America missionary, appointed Martha a Biblewoman in 1873.<sup>51</sup> She served in Kadapa for six years and was succeeded by Suviseshamma.

The inauguration of a training center for Biblewomen at the Chittoor Female Seminary in 1878 by the Reformed Church of America (RCA) missionaries brought the office closer to the Northern Circars. Although it is located in what is now Andhra Pradesh, most of its students were Tamils. The Chittoor Female Seminary was founded in 1855, initially to provide basic education to the daughters of native Christians.<sup>52</sup> Through it, missionaries hoped to prepare “good and faithful wives” for native evangelists and teachers.<sup>53</sup> Hoping to produce “intelligent and companionable” wives, missionaries evolved a curriculum modeled on those of the Female Seminaries in North America.<sup>54</sup> They introduced evangelical practices such as frugality and “house work” to their pupils, in addition to studies in the Bible, history, grammar, and geography.<sup>55</sup>

The arrival of Martha Mandeville in 1874 widened the mission of the Chittoor Seminary. Besides being a “rib factory,” the seminary became a center for zenana mission activities.<sup>56</sup> The founding of the Women’s Board of Foreign Mission in the RCA in 1875 further contributed to this broadening of vision.<sup>57</sup> At the time of its inclusion, the staff of the training center included Gnanadeepam, a Tamil Biblewoman.<sup>58</sup> Visiting caste women (zenana visits) was the primary duty of the Biblewomen trained at this center.

Meanwhile, American Baptist missionaries in the district of Nellore, south of Northern Circars, recruited at least three Biblewomen before 1880. They were Lydia, Julia, and Nagamma. At work by 1869,

Lydia may have been the earliest appointee.<sup>59</sup> Julia was active in the ministry by 1877.<sup>60</sup> She was acquainted with missionaries from her childhood.<sup>61</sup> Julia, whose pre-Christian name was Papamma, was also one of the earliest graduates of the boarding school that Euphemia Jewett, a missionary at Nellore, founded in 1849. While studying in the school, she converted to Christianity and was baptized in 1852. Her career with missionaries began four years later when she married Kanakiah, a pastor at Nellore and was the first Telugu to be ordained pastor by American Baptist missionaries.<sup>62</sup> Kanakiah, the son of a soldier, was originally from Visakhapatnam.<sup>63</sup>

Hailing from a “high” caste background, Julia’s conversion resulted in conflict in the community.<sup>64</sup> Her mother, who earlier consented to Julia’s baptism, later opposed it, perhaps because of pressure from the extended family.<sup>65</sup> She sent her daughter to the mission school but opposed her stay in the dormitory. While conversion to Christianity uprooted Julia from her social group, her marriage with Kanakiah, a Naidu by caste, relocated her back in the social ranking.<sup>66</sup>

Nagamma, a Madiga from Tallakondapadu, the epicenter of the Madiga group conversions, was another early Biblewoman.<sup>67</sup> Before conversion to Christianity, she may have followed the Shaivite tradition, as many of her neighbors including Periah did. Shaivites worshipped Shiva, a creator-destroyer god crowned with a cobra. Although considered one of the most popular and earliest expressions of Hinduism, Shaivite beliefs and practices differ from those of Brahminical Hinduism. The name of Nagamma, literally meaning “mother snake,” attests to Shaivite influences on Nagamma’s family. While most Madigas in Tallakondapadu converted to Christianity, Nagamma’s husband refused to follow suit. Defying her husband, Nagamma, a mother of three sons, converted to Christianity. The death of two sons enraged her husband and in-laws. Fearing that the anger of community goddesses was the reason for these deaths in the family, Nagamma’s husband deserted her. Abandoned by her husband and left to care for her only surviving son, Nagamma approached Yerraguntla Periah and John Clough, seeking employment. John Clough and Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, an American missionary couple, appointed Nagamma as a Biblewoman.<sup>68</sup>

Lydia, a Sudhra from the Northern Circars, also served in Nellore. Hailing from Visakhapatnam, she heard of Christianity through a group of native Christian women assembled in a house-church.<sup>69</sup> After visiting the congregation four times, she decided to embrace Christianity. Lydia was baptized in the local LMS chapel. By then more than 40 years old, she relocated to Nellore the following year,

where her “family” had migrated earlier. Lydia preferred to live in mission compounds rather than with her non-Christian family, as her association with Christianity would stigmatize them and, in turn, her family might attempt to interfere with her Christian practice.<sup>70</sup> Commended by American Baptist missionaries for her “sweetest and most stirring language,”<sup>71</sup> Lydia worked with missionaries for more than 30 years from the early 1860s, in various positions.<sup>72</sup>

As the above cases demonstrate, women of different ethnic backgrounds, ages, and marital statuses showed interest in the profession, all features that became part of the profession even in the Northern Circars. There was a sharing of personnel as well. While Lydia from Visakhapatnam moved to Nellore, G. Sayamma from Nellore traveled to Bobbili, north of Visakhapatnam.

### EARLY RECRUITMENT PATTERNS IN THE NORTHERN CIRCARS

By 1880, a small group of Biblewomen had begun to work in the Northern Circars. These Biblewomen worked closely with missionary families in Akividu, Bobbili, Kakinada, Samarlakota, and Tekkali. While transplanting the office to the region, missionaries evolved their own criteria of recruitment, which contributed to its distinct character. The following section will identify the early recruitment patterns in the coastal districts and dissect how these contributed to the uniqueness of the office in the region.

#### Ethnic Diversity in the Movement

A quick glance at the biographical details of a few Biblewomen will reveal the social fabric of the profession. In order to demonstrate the ethnic diversity within the movement, I will provide brief biographical sketches of Hariamma, G. Sayamma, and Pantagani Annamma, the earliest Biblewomen in the Northern Circars.<sup>73</sup>

Hariamma, a Kshatriya from Tekkali, ministered with Canadian Baptist missionaries in Srikakulam and Tekkali. Her caste credentials earned her respect from missionaries as well as admittance into the homes of different social groups.<sup>74</sup> Born in the palace, Hariamma had access to education. As noted earlier, the princes of the day, with their progressive inclinations, permitted women in the palace to learn reading and writing. Having read a “two-paged” biblical portion with interest, Hariamma shared the leaflet with Gurhati, with whom she was in love after her husband died.<sup>75</sup> Gurhati, married by then to

another woman, was her cousin and childhood friend. Hariamma and Gurhati converted to Christianity, provoking the wrath of their families. Gurhati's first wife deserted him because of his changed religious preferences or perhaps due to his extramarital connections. Hariamma eventually married Gurhati in 1876. Excommunicated by their families, Hariamma and Gurhati lived on the outskirts of Tekkali and engaged in teaching literacy to Savaras, an indigenous community in the hills. In 1882, Canadian Baptist missionaries solemnized the wedding of the couple according to Christian rites. Widowed again in 1884, Hariamma continued to preach to Dalits and Savaras for another 23 years until her death in 1907.<sup>76</sup>

Hariamma and Gurhati were known for their generosity. Despite being ostracized by their family, they remained economically stable. They donated a piece of land for a mission school and another as a burial ground. They also constructed a well for Dalits in the town. Given her caste background and generosity, Hariamma would have been welcomed into the homes of all communities during her preaching visits.<sup>77</sup> While women of caste background might have opened their doors to her because of her Kshatriya descent, Dalits and Savaras welcomed Hariamma because of her benevolent gestures.

G. Sayamma, a Marathi Brahmin, was appointed a Biblewoman in 1881 along with her sister-in-law Neela. Hailing from Nellore, she earlier attended the girls' school founded by Euphemia Jewett.<sup>78</sup> Born in 1863, Sayamma alias Savitri grew up in an environment where British control was intact. Her grandfather was a low ranking army officer in the British regiment. Like many other native collaborators of the Company, the family of Sayamma took advantage of the educational opportunities offered by missionaries. Sayamma and her brother B. Kotiah both eventually converted to Christianity.

Sayamma married Narasiah, a Telugu Baptist pastor, in 1878. Narasiah attended the Ramayapatnam Seminary, an educational institution founded by Baptist missionaries in 1872 to train Telugu men as pastors and teachers. As the wife of a student, Sayamma might have attended the classes arranged for spouses in the seminary.<sup>79</sup> Sayamma eventually taught at her alma mater in Nellore. She later moved to Kurnool and taught there in a government school.

In 1881, soon after George and Matilda Churchill, Canadian Baptist missionaries, arrived in Bobbili, Sayamma with her family approached them for employment.<sup>80</sup> Sayamma and her sister-in-law Neela were appointed Biblewomen. Sayamma's husband Narasiah and brother Kotiah were appointed colporteurs.<sup>81</sup> While her husband toured with George Churchill, she taught at the Caste Girls' School.

Her husband, who was 27 years older than her, died in 1905. With her two sons and five daughters, Sayamma served in Bobbili for three decades, until she relocated to Kakinada in 1912.

Sayamma made use of her caste identity in her work. Born in a Brahmin family, she found employment in the Caste Girls' School. In her effort to identify herself with caste families, Sayamma, who earlier lived in the mission compound, moved to a caste neighborhood.<sup>82</sup> Right from the time of her appointment, Sayamma's primary duties included regular visits to caste homes. Sayamma gave her eldest daughter in marriage to a Niyogi Brahmin Christian, whose last name was Chaudhuri, an action that can be interpreted as another bid to assert her caste credentials.<sup>83</sup>

Pantagani Annamma (Hannah), a Biblewoman from Kallakuru, an adjacent village to Akuvidu, was a Mala (Dalit). Widowed young, she moved in with her in-laws with her one-year-old son. Unlike many widowed mothers, Annamma attended the boarding school that Canadian Baptist missionaries founded in Kakinada. She later served the school as its matron. She worked as a Biblewoman from 1880 until her death in 1907.

Missionary records do not describe Annamma in the same positive tone as applied to Sayamma or Hariamma. Instead, she was characterized as an impetuous, worldly, and impenitent woman. Mary R. B. Selman, a Canadian Baptist single woman missionary, remembered Annamma as an impulsive woman, who jumped into a canal to rescue her drowning son.<sup>84</sup> The rescued son, Panatagani Samuel, eventually became a Baptist minister. According to Selman, Annamma was a "better leader than a follower."<sup>85</sup> Selman viewed the little piece of land that Annamma owned as a reason for her assertiveness. She criticized Annamma for being preoccupied with this "worldly affair."<sup>86</sup> John Craig memorialized Annamma as a greedy and rebellious woman. According to Craig, Annamma refused to receive the "fair" allowance that missionaries gave her.<sup>87</sup> After a period of negotiation, Annamma conceded and returned to work, leaving the issue to Mrs. A. W. Woodburne's discretion.<sup>88</sup> According to Craig, only a "severe illness" could "produce this change of mind."<sup>89</sup> Craig also accused Annamma of opacity. Annamma is reported to have confessed her "covered up" sins only during the revivals of 1905, after more than two decades of impenitence.<sup>90</sup> (Craig thankfully was discrete in not naming her sins and if he did, it could have been her assertiveness).

Annamma's assertiveness, indeed, partially challenged an unsuccessful attempt by missionaries to stop paying Biblewomen. Expecting Biblewomen to raise their salaries from local congregations or work

part time, missionaries sought to remove them from their payrolls. Convinced by the missionaries' belief in the "Biblewoman-hood" of all women believers,<sup>91</sup> and perhaps jealous of the Biblewomen's regular income, local women were reluctant to pay Biblewomen. Some lay women volunteered to undertake the Bible work without pay but were afraid of visiting caste homes.<sup>92</sup> The church in Akuvidu employed a Biblewoman for a month to train women in their congregation. Sandwiched between the negligence of missionary matrons and the indifference of local sisters, all Biblewomen in the Vuyyuru field except Annamma "cheerfully" resigned from their paid positions.<sup>93</sup> Many of these Biblewomen returned to their work as agricultural laborers but Annamma, who earlier demanded fair wages, "volunteered" until missionaries paid her salary.<sup>94</sup> Through her voluntary services, Annamma overtly submitted to the whims of the missionaries but she did so only to challenge them to resume paying for her services. Despite the cynical attitudes of missionaries toward her, Annamma served as a Biblewoman for 27 years.

At least four Anglo-Indian women served as Biblewomen in this period. Canadian Baptist missionaries appointed Ellen in Samarlakota in 1880.<sup>95</sup> Priscilla Boggs was appointed and placed in Kakinada three years later. She served with Canadian Baptist missionaries for 53 years.<sup>96</sup> In 1885, the missionaries of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society employed Alice Middleton from Eluru.<sup>97</sup> Middleton had earlier studied at the CMS boarding school in Eluru.<sup>98</sup> Middleton's ability to speak Urdu secured her admission into Muslim houses, missionaries agreed.<sup>99</sup> Missionaries may have been eager to appoint Anglo-Indian applicants, especially due to the latter's ability to switch between two languages and worldviews.

Of the 53 Biblewomen whose names appear in the missionary records of American Lutherans and Canadian Baptists covering this period, we can ascertain the caste identity of at least 26 women. Of them, 11 were of caste origins while 11 were Dalits. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, names of at least four Anglo-Indian women are also recorded.

Compared to the native male clergy, the earliest generation of Biblewomen was much more ethnically diverse. Mostly men from caste backgrounds occupied pulpits in the late nineteenth century. American Baptist missionaries ordained Kanakiah, a Naidu, in 1856. Manchala Ratnam, a Niyogi Brahmin, was one of the first preachers to be ordained by the CMS.<sup>100</sup> Canadian Baptists ordained Josiah Burder, another Niyogi Brahmin, in 1874 as their first native clergy.<sup>101</sup> Nelaprolu Paulus, one of the earliest Lutheran ministers, was from

the weaver's caste.<sup>102</sup> Thus, while men of caste origins dominated the office of ordained ministry, women of different backgrounds diversified the profession of Biblewoman.

### Diversity in Educational Backgrounds

A significant number of the earliest Biblewomen were literate. They acquired the skills of reading and sometimes writing either before or after their recruitment. As will be discussed below, some of the Biblewomen attended mission schools and were nurtured for the job. Many of them were widows of pastors and possibly acquired reading skills when their husbands worked for missionaries. Although it was not officially mandated, a few missionaries, such as Americus V. Timpany, required wives of potential ministers to be literate before their husbands were ordained.<sup>103</sup>

Although an ability to read was preferred, it was not required of one to be appointed a Biblewoman. Instead, missionaries sometimes considered other gifts, such as memory and public speaking, when evaluating a candidate. For example, Addepalle Mariamma alias Veeramma, a Biblewoman from Bodaguntla, was recruited despite being "absolutely illiterate."<sup>104</sup> Mariamma's brother, a boat driver, introduced Christianity to her. Impressed with her ability to recite scriptural passages, missionaries appointed Mariamma. Katherine McLaurin lauded Mariamma for her "wonderful" memory.<sup>105</sup>

Mariamma's previous work experience also helped her candidature. Having been a Dalit (Madiga) priestess, Mariamma acquired the skills and confidence to engage in "wordy fights" with Brahmin priests.<sup>106</sup> Of course, she had to assure her employers that she had completely abandoned her old trade.<sup>107</sup> Thus, in the cases of Mariamma and a few others, memory and speaking skills compensated for illiteracy.

Some of the recruits were wives or widows of native clergy.<sup>108</sup> For example, G. Shanthamma of Srikakulam, who briefly served from 1881 until her death in 1885 as a Biblewoman, was the widow of a native pastor. American Lutheran missionaries appointed Ruth after her pastor-husband died.<sup>109</sup> It is also likely that many of these wives of native pastors attended classes in men's seminaries, such as Jeevamrutha Patasala,<sup>110</sup> a seminary founded by Canadian Baptist missionaries at Samarlakota, where spouses had special classes on biblical literacy and home management. In these cases, previous experience in church work qualified them to be Biblewomen. In summary, appointment of women with different educational backgrounds contributed to the diversity of the movement.

## Appointed Young

The movement was less diverse in terms of age. For example, Sayamma was employed when she was 18.<sup>111</sup> At the time of appointment, Annamma was a “young” widow, probably 20 years old, with a one-year-old son.<sup>112</sup> Beera Miriam alias Adamma, wife of Zaccheus, from Gunnanapudi was appointed in her mid-thirties.<sup>113</sup> P. Lizamma was the youngest recruit in the period, appointed when she was 13 years old. As these above-mentioned cases of the earliest Biblewomen suggest, several young women (i.e., in twenties or early thirties) showed an interest in the profession and missionaries were willing to appoint them.

The appointment of women of young age was not accidental. In fact, the age of a woman as a criterion in recruitment was debated at a conference when American and Canadian Baptist missionaries gathered in 1886 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their missionary work among the Telugus. Defining how and why Biblewomen should be recruited, Mary J. Frith, a single woman missionary who had arrived just four years earlier, delivered a four-page speech.<sup>114</sup> She called on her colleagues not to discriminate against an applicant on the basis of her age.

Frith briefly listed four basic principles that should guide the process of recruitment: First, the lifestyle of the applicant should be consistent with evangelical values. Second, a potential Biblewoman should believe in the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to God, just as her missionary employers did. Third, she should be familiar with the Bible and allow her life be authored by it. Fourth, an applicant should not risk her social credibility as a respectable member of the community, which invariably demanded certain levels of loyalty to traditional cultural norms.<sup>115</sup> While the first three principles demand radical discontinuity from the past and complete loyalty to a new worldview, the fourth allowed for some leeway when negotiating between the old and new value-systems.

In the second part of the speech, Frith cogently argued against discrimination of a candidate on account of age.<sup>116</sup> In expressing her hesitance to offer an opinion on the subject, Frith acknowledged an existing debate among her fellow missionaries about using an age criterion. Despite her “diffidence,” Frith had an opinion and stated it clearly. She did not challenge those who insisted that only middle-aged women could be appointed. Nor did Frith promote the imprudent admission of “very young” women.<sup>117</sup> While cautioning missionaries against age discrimination in the matter of hiring Biblewomen,

Frith called for a “tender and careful consideration” of the motives of young women candidates. Recalling her own experiences, she regretted how a mission agency ignored her sense of God’s calling, focusing on her age. She then shared an appreciation for the opportunity she received to serve as a missionary. Frith reminded the gathering that God called missionaries “young” and appealed to them that they in turn should “receive” young applicants for the ministry.<sup>118</sup> Considering the earliest appointments, one can conclude that missionaries were open to the notion of young Biblewomen. The content of the above-mentioned speech, however, suggests possible, though feeble, reservations of some missionaries to this trend. In any case, the letter reveals both the interest of young women in the profession as well as the willingness of many missionaries to appoint them.

### Compensated in Cash

Women of diverse ethnic and educational backgrounds approached missionaries and were appointed by the latter with an understanding that their labor would be compensated in cash. As agreed upon, Biblewomen received compensation for their labor on a monthly basis.

As mentioned earlier, there was a disparity in the pay. Although much was expected of them, Biblewomen were paid the least of all the mission workers. Missionaries compensated Biblewomen mostly from the funds they received from their donors in North America. Eventually, toward the end of the century, local women’s associations also contributed toward the salaries of Biblewomen.

Receiving a salary in cash had social ramifications for the status of these women. Dalit women had long contributed to the economy of their families through skilled work, such as making mats and baskets. They also worked as agricultural laborers. Their labor often was rewarded in kind, either in the form of grains or vegetables. Working for mission institutions as Biblewomen or schoolteachers, women could receive their compensation in cash, which was a threat to the status quo.

Even missionary accounts of men protesting the payment of cash wages to their wives partially reveal the level of threat this economic exchange posed. In a neighboring region, Medak, British Methodist missionaries paid 12 dubs (paisa) to women and 16 to men. While the disparity did not keep women from working, wages in cash to women infuriated the men in that area. Male members of the families pleaded with missionaries not to pay their wives in cash, lest their women be

“hardened with pride.”<sup>119</sup> This may not have been the response of all husbands of salaried women, as some of the former would have viewed their working wives as cash-earning machines. And the report, no doubt, celebrates the social intervention of the missionary writer who claimed credit for improving the status of native women. But one cannot deny that his narrative also offers a clue on how threatened the men might have been with cash in the purses of their wives.

In addition to nurses and schoolteachers, Biblewomen were the earliest salaried women in the region. In fact, in many cases, Biblewomen preceded nurses or schoolteachers in the mission station economy. Compensation in cash no doubt disturbed an established social symmetry, often resulting in an improved bargaining power for Biblewomen.

## EARLY TRAINING PATTERNS

In the training of Biblewomen, women missionaries adopted different approaches, especially in the first four decades. Appointing a woman and then training her individually as an apprentice was the most common and earliest approach. Barbara Mould, a Canadian Baptist missionary who arrived in 1905, for example, trained Kannamma of Palakonda in this way.<sup>120</sup> Martha Clark, another Canadian Baptist, is reported to have personally trained several Biblewomen in Srikakulam.<sup>121</sup> Biblewomen, in these cases, learned biblical stories and evangelistic practices while at work. A lack of formal training programs and a great need for native agents would have necessitated this strategy.

Eventually, single women missionaries formed guilds of new recruits and trained them in groups, sometimes as many as 30 at a time. In Ramachandrapuram, for example, Sarah I. Hatch and Lucy M. Jones organized year-long training programs from 1916.<sup>122</sup> Except for an hour of formal instruction every morning, most of the training took place outside the classroom. The trainees visited the homes of caste women in the afternoon and Dalit women in the evening.<sup>123</sup> New recruits were often accompanied by women missionaries.<sup>124</sup> The hospital in Ramachandrapuram, where lepers resided and were cared for, provided them opportunities to preach. Biblewomen were also given opportunities to teach children literacy. As part of their training, they memorized, recited, and sang biblical texts. Introducing biblical stories, missionary teachers at the same time provided the recruits with hermeneutical skills. They also showed them how to invite their auditors to faith in Christ.<sup>125</sup>

Grooming potential Biblewomen in boarding schools right from their childhood was another strategy that missionaries employed. Gathering potential Biblewomen, women missionaries offered more formal training in select mission schools. For example, at the Kakinada Girls' Boarding School founded by Canadian Baptist missionaries, Agnes Baskerville introduced an “extra class for the training of prospective Bible women and teachers” in 1890.<sup>126</sup> She employed two Biblewomen to assist in this training program.<sup>127</sup> Lekkala Salome, who worked in Narsipatnam until 1905, attended this class.<sup>128</sup> Upgrading the Caste Girls' School in Bobbili into a Central Boarding School for Girls in 1901, Matilda Churchill included a training program for prospective teachers and Biblewomen.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, since 1901, American Lutheran missionaries trained prospective Biblewomen at Mangalamandiram (“House of Blessings”) in Guntur, which earlier was established as a caste girls' school in 1884. In these schools, some older girls in the schools apprenticed with Biblewomen and acquired the necessary skills and experience.<sup>130</sup>

Continuing education was a fourth strategy. Missionary matrons used summer refresher courses and monthly meetings to train their native collaborators. The hot weather during the summer season confined both Biblewomen and missionaries to the mission compound and so provided them with occasions to study and reflect.<sup>131</sup> These occasional workshops included daily classes and prayers.<sup>132</sup> Missionaries also organized women's Bible classes daily, where they explained various books of the Bible.

### CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE OFFICE IN THE NORTHERN CIRCARS

In its appropriation, the office retained some of the beliefs and practices of its mother movement in Britain. Informed by the local social interests and cultural values, there were variances as well. While the emphasis of Telugu Biblewomen on the Bible and the strategy of house visitation resonate with their British counterparts, the broader paradigm of ministry and focus on the family were distinctive to the region.

#### “With Bibles in Hands”

Telugu Biblewomen inherited an emphasis on the Bible from their British counterparts. Indeed, visual and textual portraits show Biblewomen with “Bibles in hands.”<sup>133</sup> The Telugu words for

Biblewomen, *bhodakuralu* and *bible panthulamma*, sum up their job description. While the word *bhodakuralu* means female preacher, the phrase *bible panthulamma* means Bible teacher. The Baptist communities used the former to imply that a Biblewoman was the female equivalent of a male evangelist. The Lutheran congregations called them *bible panthulamma*, a female counterpart of the male catechist. In either case, both communities associated the profession with the Bible.

This emphasis on Scripture emerged out of the evangelical view of the Bible dearly held by missionaries. Many conversion accounts recorded by missionaries begin with a convert's reading of a scriptural portion and culminate in the reader's conversion.<sup>134</sup> For example, Lydia, whom I mentioned earlier, met a group of Telugu Christians assembled in a house-church in Visakhapatnam. In their first three conversations, the group used the method of disputation to convince Lydia. The women in the group eventually realized that this method could only result in animosity. They then responded to a question that Lydia had. When Lydia asked how she could obtain salvation, they advised that she could "understand all if only she read the Bible."<sup>135</sup> The group taught her to read. Lydia's reading of the Bible thus resulted in her conversion, according to the story. In another conversion narrative, Makovali Sooramma, a Brahmin woman, did not accept Jesus as her Lord until "the Word of God got into" her "head."<sup>136</sup> These narratives attest to a common missionary view of the Bible, that the Spirit uses Scripture to cause the conversion of individuals.<sup>137</sup> Missionaries transmitted this view to their employees.

Having appropriated a missionary view of Scripture, the early Biblewomen in the Northern Circars evolved the following practices in their personal piety and professional practices:

1. Telugu Biblewomen shared their faith through the narration of biblical stories.

The instruction of religious truths through stories was not alien either to the biblical writers or to their Telugu auditors. Having grown up in a culture of oral tradition, Telugu Biblewomen were accustomed to communicating religious messages through storytelling. The Bhakti tradition in which most Hindus of the region were nurtured transmitted its religious values through its ancient epics or *puranas*, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as well as through numerous local stories centered on characters from the *puranas*.<sup>138</sup> In addition to overhearing tales from their Hindu neighbors, Dalits were accustomed

to transmit their cosmology, history, and ethos through their own folklore. The Bible, the book that Biblewomen embraced and identified with, offered them many compelling stories to choose from. Hence, communicating the Christian faith through stories was both natural and relevant for Telugu Biblewomen.

Anna Kugler, founder of the Women's Hospital at Guntur, identified the parable of the farmer with seeds, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, as the favorite story of Biblewomen.<sup>139</sup> Kugler argued that Biblewomen in her hospital repeatedly told this story because most of the auditors were agricultural laborers. The image of a farmer with seeds and the classification of soils would draw the hearers to the story. The story not only locates the listeners in various levels of receptivity and preparatory grace but it also highlights the agency of the preacher, in this case Biblewomen, at the center of the moment. Through their repeated rendering of this story, Biblewomen not only expressed their trust in the ability of Scripture to produce faith but also celebrated their role as preachers.

The oft-repeated narration of the story of Elizabeth's pregnancy from the Gospel of Luke likewise indicates how Biblewomen used biblical stories to address the immediate needs of their clients. Abishekamma, a chief nurse and Biblewoman at Medak Hospital, founded by the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries, repeatedly related this story to waiting outpatients.<sup>140</sup> Arley Munson, a doctor in the hospital, reported that auditors sometimes flocked back to hear the story again. The tale of Elizabeth's conception would certainly have appealed to this audience, as most of them were childless. Maternity hospitals founded by missionaries particularly attracted women who were hoping for the birth of a child after many years of marriage. The story of a child's birth in the older age of Elizabeth heightened the auditors' hope for a child.<sup>141</sup> Through this narrative, Biblewomen not only addressed the immediate and physical needs of their clients but also introduced the Christian God as one capable of meeting their needs.

## 2. Telugu Biblewomen communicated the gospel message also in songs.

Missionary employers and native clients respected a Biblewoman for the number of hymns and scriptural verses she memorized and recited.<sup>142</sup> This was because singing had importance in both religious and social contexts. Women and lower-ranking castes in the Bhakti tradition sang praises for their personal deity.<sup>143</sup> Among the Dalits, women soothsayers predicted the futures of their clients in song form

while Dekkali historians sang of the Dalit heritage.<sup>144</sup> While working in agricultural fields, Dalit women sang songs of social protest and freedom.<sup>145</sup>

The singing of Biblewomen served many functions. First, it drew and held the attention of listeners.<sup>146</sup> Biblewomen used songs to draw the attention of people of all ages and in different settings. They reached out to children in schools during weekly story-times. Standing in streets, they gathered people and introduced Christianity to them. Visiting houses, they sat with women in their homes while the men were away at work. In hospitals, Biblewomen approached outpatients, while the latter waited to register their names and consult doctors.<sup>147</sup> By teaching songs, Biblewomen committed the Christian message to the memory of hearers.<sup>148</sup> A Biblewoman is reported to have taught her clients as many as 30 songs.<sup>149</sup> Biblewomen also taught Christian hymns to Dalit women workers, as the landlords were more inclined to permit Christian hymns than the songs of dissent that the former often sang in the fields.<sup>150</sup>

Second, singing bridged the social barrier between Biblewomen and their auditors. Malcolm Orchard, a Canadian Baptist missionary, argued that songs reduced caste prejudices.<sup>151</sup> As mentioned earlier, Biblewomen included women from Dalit, Hindu, and Anglo-Indian origins. During this period, women missionaries accompanied Biblewomen in most house visitations. Ordinarily, Hindu families would not have welcomed these pairs of women, especially if the team included a woman of Dalit or Anglo-Indian or North American backgrounds. It is probable that Biblewomen used melodies to sing their way into houses that otherwise would have been closed to them due to caste prejudices.

Third, singing or hearing Scriptures in song also was believed to be salvific, especially for Hindus. In their work, Biblewomen approached many Hindu women. Sanskrit, the language in which the *Vedas*, the earliest Hindu Scriptures, were written, was sung in rhythm. Hindus revered the practice of *sahkeertanas*, group singing of the Scriptures, as sacred and liberating. A Hindu passed through various events of life, such as marriage and funeral rites, accompanied by the recital of sacred hymns chanted by Brahmin priests. A profession of faith and the recital of Scripture in song would have drawn Telugus to the preaching of the Christian message that followed the song. Moreover, by singing scriptural verses, which Telugus considered salvific but the Dalits were not permitted even to hear, Dalit women renegotiated their social status and claimed custodianship over *moksha* (salvation).

We are not sure if these Biblewomen composed any songs themselves. But Telugu Christians had a long tradition of composing songs, both to use in their worship and to share their faith with non-Christian neighbors. Protestant Brahmin male bards, such as Purushottam Choudhari and Pulipaka Jagannatham, composed long hymns using Brahminical themes and tunes since the early nineteenth century, the earliest phase of Hindu-Protestant encounter among the Telugus. These hymns expressed and evoked personal devotion, using resources drawn especially from the Bhakti tradition.<sup>152</sup> While most of them expressed praise for what God meant to the different singers and gratitude for what God had done for them in Christ, some songs invited hearers to faith in Christ.

Not to be left behind, Dalit Christian women composed numerous songs that extensively drew from biblical passages. They mostly celebrated the life of Jesus or focused on the Christian home. The songs of Gnanaratnamma Philip, Vesapogu Gulbanamma, and Katta Chandramma, all of whom were schoolteachers, reflect this focus on Christ and the model Christian family.<sup>153</sup>

3. As mentioned earlier, significant numbers of Biblewomen possessed reading skills, having attended mission or government schools. The missionaries' primary objective in founding schools and introducing literacy was to enable natives to read the Bible. Reading Scripture in private was another practice that Biblewomen acquired from their British counterparts.

By learning to read a Scripture, Biblewomen acquired a skill that was denied to women in the Brahminical Hindu culture. Hindu propriety prohibited both women and Dalits from hearing and reading the sacred Scriptures. Molten metal was to be poured into their ears if they heard the Hindu Scriptures, the *Vedas*, being read. Thus, through their ability to read religious texts, which was a prerogative of Brahmin men in traditional society, Biblewomen created a parallel hierarchy in the new religion and so asserted their leadership.

The practice of reading Scripture, however, signaled a major paradigm shift for Biblewomen, especially those of Dalit origin. As I suggested earlier, Dalit priestesses, viewing themselves as the mouthpieces of goddesses, had uttered divine oracles. They entered trance at the time of communal sacrifice or procession and spoke on behalf of the deity that possessed them.<sup>154</sup> Musical invocations or the sight of flames often stimulated these revelations. Dalits thus were accustomed to expect divine revelation to come in oral form. After converting to

Christianity, they had to shift from their belief in theophanies to trust in the written word of God. However, the idea of religious truths being available in sacred texts was not completely alien, as, despite being pushed to the fringes of society, Dalits were in interaction with Hindu and Muslim communities that believed in sacred texts.

While preaching and singing are carryovers from their pre-Christian cultures, the ability to read separates Biblewomen from their non-Christian—Dalit and Sudhra—counterparts. Biblewomen viewed an ability to read the Bible not only as a requisite of their office but also an aspect of good Christian practice. Literacy and the mastery of scriptural portions earned them religious authority. These skills also secured them social respect.

### A Multifaceted Ministry

Although the job of Biblewomen was centered on the Bible, it was not confined to preaching alone. Telugu Biblewomen, in the first phase of their work, that is, 1880–1922, often played multiple roles. The tasks Biblewomen performed provide us a clue about their understanding of ministry.

The needs in the maternity hospitals founded by missionaries offered Biblewomen opportunities to minister. In addition to a few hospitals for lepers and numerous mobile dispensaries, Canadian Baptist missionaries, for example, established hospitals in Akuvudu (1898), Yelamanchili (1898), Srikakulam (1899), Pithapuram (1904), and Vuyyuru (1906), with special facilities for women. During this period, American Lutheran missionaries founded two such hospitals, in Guntur (1883) and Rajahmundry (1899). Missionaries placed several Biblewomen in these hospitals.

Biblewomen distributed Christian literature and preached the Christian message, especially while patients and their attendants waited for registration in the visitor's lounge.<sup>155</sup> They visited inpatients and their families who attended them. Given the taboos regarding cooking and a strong possibility of Dalit chefs preparing food in the hospital cafeteria, families of Hindu background accompanied patients with a stove and lived in the hospital until the ailing family member was discharged. Despite the fear of being “defiled,” inpatients and their families tolerated the visitations of Biblewomen in the hospital wards.<sup>156</sup> Acquaintances made in the hospitals sometimes secured Biblewomen admittance into the homes of former patients when they visited their villages, thus proving to be points of contact between Biblewomen and rural communities.<sup>157</sup>

In some cases, Biblewomen served also as nurses. The roles of nurse and Biblewoman could overlap so much that in Medak Hospital, Abishekamma, a nursing superintendent also functioned as chief Biblewoman.<sup>158</sup> Every hospital was thought to need a nurse and a Biblewoman. It is likely that missionaries preferred native women who could play dual roles, especially due to the shortage of personnel in this phase. Moreover, the presence of Biblewomen in hospitals, especially those specialized in maternity cases, was helpful to both women in labor and attendant doctors, as most Biblewomen were aware of the physical processes involved, the related social practices, and the beliefs about childbirth.<sup>159</sup>

Biblewomen stationed in villages where there was no dispensary or hospital sometimes possessed medical supplies. In emergencies, they provided first aid and arranged for the patient's visit to a mission hospital. They administered basic medicine in situations of intermittent fever.<sup>160</sup> Medicine thus occasioned meetings of Biblewomen with non-Christians.

Within the context of hospitals, Biblewomen often functioned as teachers as well. Esther, a Biblewoman at Guntur Hospital, for example, is said to have taught literacy to six *ayahs* in one year.<sup>161</sup> Esther, whose parents died in the famine of 1899, had been an inpatient in the Guntur Hospital.<sup>162</sup> After her healing and conversion, she remained in the hospital and was appointed as a resident Biblewoman there. Esther's duties included preaching to the patients, visiting the sick, and teaching *ayahs* to read.

In many cases, Biblewomen taught literacy in schools. Missionaries who founded schools often sought the services of these women. Biblewomen in many ways were equipped to teach literacy, since many of them attended training classes and normal schools.<sup>163</sup> In some cases, the appointment of a Biblewoman preceded those of school-teachers. For example, upon his arrival in Samarlakota, Americus V. Timpany, a Canadian Baptist missionary, started a school there in 1880. His only employee Ellen, an Anglo-Indian Biblewoman, was its founding teacher. Occasionally, a Biblewoman played all the roles that a school needed. For example, Neela, a Biblewoman at Bobbili, was a chef, teacher, and matron of the boarding school. Her colleague and sister-in-law, Sayamma, was a schoolteacher.<sup>164</sup>

Biblewomen also provided leadership to groups of native Christian women. Modeled after the women's mission circles in North America that funded and prayed for single women missionaries, Telugu Christian women organized clubs of women for "mutual helpfulness."<sup>165</sup> The women in the Godavari Association of the Telugu Baptists formed a Women's Helpmeet Society in 1897, for

example, while their counterparts in the Kolair Association founded one the following year.<sup>166</sup> In both cases, the respective Associations requested Biblewomen to form local circles. These groups met every month and every member paid one paisa per month as a membership fee.<sup>167</sup> These associations that the Biblewomen organized, in turn, contributed to the salaries of the latter.

The modeling of Christian piety in the nascent Christian community went parallel with inviting non-Christians to believe in Christ. M. Helena Blackadar, a Canadian Baptist single woman, compared the work of G. Sayamma with that of Deborah in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>168</sup> Blackadar called Sayamma “a mother in Israel,” a title that had been used for Deborah in the Book of Judges.<sup>169</sup> Deborah was a community leader, military commander and singer, when the land-seeking people of Israel were at war with the inhabitants of Canaan. Blackadar lauded Sayamma’s skills of teaching, preaching, nursing, and encouragement.<sup>170</sup> But it was Sayamma’s ability to care for the sick and comfort the discouraged that earned her the title “Mother of Israel.”<sup>171</sup> Blackadar used the same title to highlight the comforting ministry of Balluri Martha, a Biblewoman from Ramachandrapuram.<sup>172</sup> Martha’s hospitable approach is reported to have mellowed even caste hostilities.

The image of Anna the Prophetess has also been used to describe the ministry of a Biblewoman. In this case, it was borrowed to describe the work and appearance of Lydia, a Biblewoman in Nellore, south of the Northern Circars. Citing Samuel F. Smith, David Downie, an American Baptist missionary, compared Lydia’s “appearance, dress, manner,” plus her practice of personal prayer and fasting to that of Anna the Prophetess.<sup>173</sup> Smith borrowed this model from the Lucan infancy narrative. Anna was reported to have celebrated Jesus’s birth and to have foretold his life mission at the time of his circumcision.<sup>174</sup> The Gospel writer mentioned that Anna lived most of her life in the Temple at Jerusalem, praying and fasting.<sup>175</sup> Many Biblewomen practiced long periods of personal prayer as part of their daily routine before they began their house visitations. In invoking these biblical images, missionaries not only expressed their vision for this ministry but also recognized the common practices of Biblewomen with respect to hospitality, encouragement, and personal prayer.

Thus, the job description of the Biblewomen included the dissemination of biblical knowledge, teaching in mission schools, caregiving in hospitals, and the modeling of Christian piety. A shortage of trained teachers and nurses as well as the emerging skills of the Biblewomen together contributed to this enlarged view of ministry.

### Blurring the Boundaries

Touring was a part of a Biblewoman's everyday schedule. In order to introduce the Christian religion and disseminate biblical knowledge, Biblewomen visited women of Hindu, Muslim, and Dalit backgrounds in their homes while their men were away during the daytime.<sup>176</sup> The house visitation work of Biblewomen slightly differed from that of zenana workers. With a few exceptions, the visits of zenana workers were confined to the homes of Muslim and Hindu women, where they taught reading skills on a regular basis and occasionally gave lessons on the Bible. Zenana workers mostly were women of "high" caste backgrounds. On the other hand, Biblewomen visited women of outcaste origins as well and focused on teaching the Bible.<sup>177</sup> Occasionally, Biblewomen served as zenana workers as well.

For many Biblewomen, their career began with travel. While some relocated to regions very far from home, many moved away from their immediate communities to neighboring villages. At the time of appointment, for example, Sayamma traveled four hundred miles, a journey that would have taken at least three weeks.<sup>178</sup> An unnamed Biblewoman from Akuvidu traveled 150 miles north of her hometown to work in Narsipatnam.<sup>179</sup> These travels defied the social restrictions that Telugu culture routinely imposed on women. And, as part of their job, Biblewomen constantly crossed village and community boundaries.

The itinerary of Biblewomen in a context where travel, especially by women, was highly restricted certainly had serious social ramifications. The dominant sectors of Telugu society sought to regulate social interaction between individuals of different castes or communities. The *varnashrama dharma* that the dominant created not only specified what a particular caste group should do (division of labor) but also designated where it should be (geographical boundaries). It preserved and perpetuated its cultural "nomos" by demarcating boundaries between social groups and the neighborhoods they lived in.<sup>180</sup> Each Telugu village was clearly divided into separate locales, *petas* or *palles*, according to caste identity.<sup>181</sup> Brahmins, the *agravarnas*, who were ranked "highest" in the social ladder, resided in *agraharams*, higher in altitude. The Vaisya subgroups, such as Komitis or Shavakars, inhabited the main bazaar of each village or town. The Kamma or Reddy *reedhis* (streets) were the power centers, as landlords resided there. Malas and Madigas were pushed to the hamlets called *peta* or *waada* (neighborhood) at the fringes of a village.<sup>182</sup> Caste communities forbade their members from entering the neighborhoods of

other castes and prohibited members of other groups from stepping onto their terrain. Breaching the territorial boundaries was considered defiling to both the trespasser and the violated space. Since mobility threatened the “purity” of the communities or social equilibrium, the dominant prohibited travel: (i) overseas, (ii) outside one’s village, and (iii) between different caste-based neighborhoods.<sup>183</sup>

Many Hindu communities believed that travel to a foreign country would defile an individual and disrupt her worldview.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, Brahminical propriety required that an individual who had traveled overseas should undergo the rites of *shuddhi* or purification in order to be welcomed back into the community.<sup>185</sup> Two reasons for the traveler’s impurity were commonly cited. First, some Hindu mythologies identified the sea waters as defiling monsters. Second, it might be suggested that the traveler had associated herself with aliens who were born outside the Hindu social structure of caste.<sup>186</sup> (The so-called great soul, Mohandas Gandhi of Gujarat, also had to undergo such ritual of purification when he returned from South Africa in 1914). As Peter Berger suggests, travel across the seas to foreign communities exposes an individual to another nomos and the return home could open the possibility of competing worldviews.<sup>187</sup>

The Brahminical social order also restricted the travel of an individual, especially of the marginalized, between villages. Women, especially those of caste origins, could not cross the village boundaries unless accompanied by a male member of the family, even if only a small boy. It was widely believed that malevolent spirits residing at the outskirts would defile a woman if she crossed the village boundaries.

A third restriction was on an individual’s mobility between different neighborhoods within a village. In a highly demarcated society, caste and outcaste communities strictly barred people from other social groups entering their territory. When such spatial arrangements were violated, both the trespasser and the transgressed were considered defiled. While the community of the trespasser could ritually purify the individual, the owners of the desecrated space had to cleanse the site with turmeric water. Even Dalits washed their streets if a Brahmin passed too near. Physical mobility between caste-based neighborhoods potentially subverted the social distinction upon which the *varnashrama dharma* rested.

Even as the dominant sought to fortify the social order by restricting geographical mobility of individuals, some social groups attempted to sabotage the established social symmetry through travel. The colonial environment facilitated these subversive travels both on the subcontinent and overseas. Grewel, in her fascinating work *Home and Harem*,

analyzes the culture of travel during the colonial era.<sup>188</sup> According to her, travel, for the affluent sections, was identical with modernity while it meant livelihood for the marginalized.<sup>189</sup> Men and women of “lower” castes traveled abroad as servants, sailors, and unskilled laborers during the colonial period.<sup>190</sup> With respect to the Northern Circars, the British rulers offered free passage to Telugus who would migrate to Natal, South Africa, as plantation workers.<sup>191</sup>

Taking advantage of their connections with missionaries, some caste converts traveled abroad.<sup>192</sup> Two Telugu Baptist women, Krishnaalu and an unnamed colleague, for example, were reported to have traveled with Americus V. Timpany aboard a ship from New York in 1867.<sup>193</sup> The reports of her possessing jewelry and renouncing it for the sake of mission work after visiting the United States indicate that Krishnaalu was not poor.<sup>194</sup> Krishnaalu’s choice of name for her son as Veeraswamy attests further that she was of caste background. Her daughter-in-law, Sita, later named Sarah, also traveled abroad to care for the children of David Downie, an American Baptist missionary.<sup>195</sup> Educated at the Peddie Institute in New Jersey, Sita eventually worked with American and Canadian Baptist missionaries as a Biblewoman from 1896.<sup>196</sup>

Travel to sacred shrines can represent a subversive use of religion. While the gifts of the pilgrims benefitted the priestly class, mobility undermined the geographical restrictions. As Grewel suggests, pilgrimages were more a part of Bhakti spirituality than of Brahminical propriety, the former being the counterculture to the latter.<sup>197</sup> The pilgrimages of Pandita Ramabai<sup>198</sup> and Chandra Leela,<sup>199</sup> celebrated Brahmin women converts to Christianity, attest to the travel practices of “high-caste” women. Utilizing these religious resources, some Matangis took up lifelong pilgrimages wandering from one shrine to another, thus commanding a measure of respect and dignity that their social identity denied them.<sup>200</sup>

Born “impure” and relegated to the defiled space outside the village *polimera* (as if to reside among the malevolent spirits there), Dalits created an alternative social world but on occasions entered the cultic life of caste communities. Periodic processions led by Dalit priestesses held annually or in times of disease and natural calamity represent the ritual space the marginalized were creating within the dominant culture.<sup>201</sup> During these processions, a Dalit priestess followed by male assistants visited caste neighborhoods, cursing and humiliating the residents. Meanwhile, often groups of Dalit women forced their way into Hindu neighborhoods as soothsayers.

Women of Sudhra communities also participated in this process of social engineering. Sudhra women, such as Bandikatla Veeramma, itinerated and preached in “messianic” movements led by Pothuluri Veerabrahmam and Yogi Nasraiah in the late nineteenth century.<sup>202</sup> Veeramma not only crossed village boundaries but also social divisions by visiting Dalit hamlets.

The British colonial administration, through its transportation facilities, roads, and vehicles, hastened cultural currents that eventually obliterated geographical boundaries and social norms. Opportunities to travel overseas under imperial patronage and the need for subsistence took a number of families abroad. A cash-based economy pushed Dalits (and Sudhras) to seek customers beyond their village boundaries. Women of all ethnic backgrounds attempted to undermine social and physical restrictions through religiously legitimized practices. By itinerating in this context of social reordering as part of their ministerial calling, Telugu Biblewomen were unconsciously participating in a larger process of social disruption.

### **But Not Too Far from Home**

Even while teaching that the primary duty of a woman is to make a home and teach their children,<sup>203</sup> Canadian Baptist missionaries demanded of Telugu Biblewomen that they pay undivided attention to their professional lives. Slightly different is the case of Tamil Biblewomen in South Travancore, where, according to British historian Jane Haggis, Biblewomen became dedicated workers when women missionaries required them to be good wives and caring mothers.<sup>204</sup>

In the Northern Circars, Canadian Baptist missionaries sometimes penalized Biblewomen for attending to their domestic duties. In four known cases of untimely suspensions, three were because Biblewomen were guilty of attending to “family cares.”<sup>205</sup> Sarah I. Hatch, a Canadian Baptist single missionary, complained that three of the four Biblewomen in Ramachandrapuram were swamped by their family cares. She found one guilty of helping her son build a house.<sup>206</sup> Hatch grudgingly relieved her from work for two months to attend to her “family cares,” as if one’s commitment to work and family could not coexist.<sup>207</sup> The services of the other two were terminated indefinitely. Missionaries were silent about the cause of another suspension in Srikakulam.<sup>208</sup> These cases illustrate how missionaries required the Biblewomen to prefer professional duties over family commitments.

But the missionary requirement to go beyond the domestic life did not result in complete abandoning of home. The itinerary patterns of Telugu Biblewomen reveal this continued commitment to family. Unlike celebrated “high-caste” preachers and Western missionaries who traveled hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of kilometers, the itinerary of Biblewomen was more limited. For example, Puroshottam Choudary, a hymn writer, traveled around 2000 kilometers (1300 miles), debating in market places and inviting non-Christians to convert.<sup>209</sup> In one of his preaching tours, Jacob Chamberlain, an RCA missionary, traversed the Nizam’s Dominion and the Northern Circars, taking more than four months and covering 1900 kilometers (1200 miles).<sup>210</sup> In a typical missionary tour, a male missionary accompanied by male local agents traveled for a week or two.<sup>211</sup> Biblewomen, on the other hand, traveled, but not too far. They returned to their houses at end of the day except when they had to attend professional development programs, such as the Refresher Course, which occurred only once or twice a year.<sup>212</sup> While the travel shows the willingness of Biblewomen to defy social restrictions, returning home at the end of the day reveals their conformity to the traditional gender role of a mother.

Despite missionary expectations, Biblewomen in the Northern Circars tactfully synchronized their commitments to work and family instead of preferring one over another. Working as a family in church work facilitated a harmonization of loyalties. As mentioned earlier, Biblewomen often joined the profession along with their family members. In many cases, they were wives or widows or mothers of male evangelists. There were also a few cases when eligible adults of an entire family were on the missionary payroll. For example, Sarah Philip, a Biblewoman in Guntur, was daughter of Murari Samuel, a Lutheran pastor.<sup>213</sup> Her brothers, David and Nathaniel, served as Lutheran pastors. She married Philip Benjamin, another Lutheran minister.<sup>214</sup> Sarah’s sons, Philip Leisenring and P. B. Paul, were ordained ministers.<sup>215</sup> Since family members shared the professional interests of Biblewomen, the conflict between professional and domestic interests remained minimal.

The number of children Biblewomen groomed to be in church work further attests to this dual commitment. For example, Morampudi Sarah groomed five of her six children for mission work.<sup>216</sup> Pantagani Annamma named her son Samuel and raised him for a religious vocation, just as her namesake, Hannah, did in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>217</sup> The love for family and work resulted in continuity of the church work in the family for generations.

Belonging to a family of mission workers may have indirectly ensured the continuity of traditional gender roles. Since male members of the family itinerated with men missionaries for longer periods, Biblewomen had to return home at the end of the day to care for their children. This ability of Biblewomen to synchronize professional and domestic lives also reveals their interest in challenging cultural norms even while complying with traditional gender expectations.

In summary, a missionary need for female agents and the interest of local women to minister brought the office to the Northern Circars. The evangelical beliefs of the missionaries and pre-Christian social practices together shaped the early practices of Telugu Biblewomen. While the focus on Scripture, a written word of God, was borrowed from evangelicals from the Western hemisphere, the practice of narrating, singing, and memorizing parts of the Bible were culturally conditioned and socially subversive. A missionary view that teaching and nursing are feminine mission professions as well as the skills of the Biblewomen involved broadened their job description beyond the mere preaching of the Bible. A willingness to itinerate while still focusing on family shows the ability of Biblewomen to handle the seesaw of change and continuity.

## INSTITUTIONALIZING A MINISTRY: 1922–1947

The establishment of women's seminaries in the Northern Circars was a decisive milestone in the professionalization of the office of Biblewoman. This process of institutionalization brought with it many changes to the movement, which were influenced by the social and political dynamics of the era. The centrality of the Bible and the focus on home remained consistent but the movement saw significant changes in the patterns of training employed, expanded native participation in leadership, and the social fabric of the institution. This chapter identifies the social dynamics that contributed to the professionalization of the office and how such factors necessitated and shaped alterations, for example, in recruitment practices, modes of training, touring patterns, and employee-employer relationships.

### A CHANGING SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Of the historical contingencies that significantly affected the profession in the 1920s, three are noteworthy. First, at the national level, this period is marked by a significant upsurge of "nationalist" struggle led by the Indian National Congress (INC) against colonial rule. Second, at the regional level, there was increased interest among the Sudhra communities in Christianity. Third, in the coastal districts, there were new opportunities for and changes in the way professional training and higher education were offered.

#### **Missionary Anxiety amid Growing "Nationalist" Sentiments**

Socially and politically, the 1920s were volatile and eventful in the history of British India. Simmering anti-British *Raj* sentiments on the subcontinent received a significant boost with the entrance of

Mohandas Gandhi into the “nationalist” struggle in 1915. Growing discontent against the *Raj* had its ripple effects on the Northern Circars as well, especially on the missionary activities.

The nationalist leaders opposed religious conversions, which, of course, Christian missionaries promoted. They called on missionaries to shun proselytizing native non-Christians. By the same token, converts were penalized for embracing non-Hindu faiths. Indian National Congress activists, the self-styled guardians of an Indian “nation,” portrayed conversion to a non-Hindu faith as an act of treason.

In relation to Dalits, the Congress Party presented two faces: moderate and militant. The moderate wing sought to convince the Dalit masses that the Hindu communities were no longer inimical to them. In 1932, they organized a branch of Harijan Sevak Sangh, founded by Mohandas Gandhi, in Vijayawada.<sup>1</sup> The Sangh condemned untouchability and advocated the opening of Hindu temples to Dalits.<sup>2</sup> During his visit to the region the following year, Gandhi attempted to enter a temple in Gudivada with a group of Dalits, as though the latter were desperate to enter temples. He collected alms from the social elite and established a Harijan Biksha (Dalit Fund) for the welfare of Dalits. Subsequently, the local branch of Harijan Sevak Sangh established schools and hostels for Dalit students, which offered opportunities for formal education.

While Harijan Sevak Sangh specialized in “serving” (*seva*), its militant counterpart, Suddhi Sangh of the INC, focused on purifying (*suddhi*) society that, it thought, was contaminated by modernity, alien religions, and colonial legislation. Stressing the purity of Hindu society and claiming the unity of a single Indian nation, Suddhi Sangh threatened native Christians, urging them to abandon their faith and embrace the Hindu *dharma* or social order.<sup>3</sup> In order to discourage religious conversions to Christianity, the group attacked native preachers and Bible colporteurs.<sup>4</sup> These activities of the militant nationalists were a challenge to the Christianizing agenda of native converts and missionaries.

The moral policing of the freedom fighters had been another challenge to the reforming programs of the missionaries. Citing the proceedings of a Brahmin Conference purportedly held in December 1928, Canadian Baptist missionaries reported that the Brahmin community had objected to foreign intervention in the cultural affairs of natives.<sup>5</sup> The conference was reported to have perceived the education of girls as an affront to Hindu religious ideals and insisted on the early marriage of girls. This 1929 report in part shows how some Hindu groups responded to reforms. But at the same time, it indicates the fears of the missionary fraternity toward these militant groups.

The challenge posed to British rule by nationalist leaders unnerved the Baptist and Lutheran missionaries in particular. Many missionaries in the region viewed British administration as a stabilizing force in an otherwise war-torn territory, as evident in the view of David Downie, an American Baptist missionary. In a book published in 1924, Downie listed three major accomplishments of British rule in the subcontinent: first, the British warded off “foreign” invasions in the territory (as if British were not foreign); second, they unified many kingdoms and provided a single governmental structure that granted a uniform set of civil and religious rights to all their subjects; and third, they created an unparalleled infrastructure for economic development through irrigation, railway, and postal systems.<sup>6</sup> Christina Eriksson, the founding principal of Charlotte Swenson Memorial Bible Training School at Rajahmundry, after returning to her home country, echoed this sentiment. According to her, the British had done “splendid work in maintaining peace between various castes.”<sup>7</sup> This sympathetic opinion about the British Empire may have been prompted by gratitude for the benefits the missionaries and their converts received from the colonial administration.

Such a benevolent view of empire was not new to the region. Many missionaries in the late nineteenth century shared it. For example, Adam Rowe, an American Lutheran missionary in Guntur between 1874 and 1882, believed that England had been given a moral duty to educate the natives in politics, science, arts, and literature.<sup>8</sup> Rowe would have seen the Christianization of natives as a part of this duty. Many missionaries elsewhere in the British Commonwealth also shared this belief that God had entrusted the British with territories to care for, civilize, and Christianize their inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> This attitude that Andrew Porter, a British historian, calls trusteeship, continued to influence colonial and missionary relationships well into the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

Missionary trust in the moral responsibility of colonial government expressed itself in many ways among missionaries in the British colonies. While some advocated the active disruption of native customs through colonial legislation, many others desired the cooperation of colonial officials in mission activities and the promotion of Western education. Perceiving the colonial administration as a guardian of the principles of liberty, many of these missionaries would have viewed the British as irresponsible rulers had the latter not collaborated in their reforming activities. Like their colleagues elsewhere in the empire, many missionaries in the Northern Circars would have found the British rule not only acceptable but also divinely appointed, as long

as colonial officials permitted and even encouraged their intervention in the region.<sup>11</sup>

Missionary support of the colonial presence may have been further strengthened by other practical considerations. For example, missionaries depended on the colonial officials for licenses to preach as well as grants of land and money to establish schools and hospitals.<sup>12</sup> Many British officers, for their part, found missionaries to be effective catalysts for social change (and perhaps advocates of imperial rule) given their connections at the local level.<sup>13</sup> In the Madras Presidency, the colonial administration openly supported Christian missionary educational activities through governmental funds.<sup>14</sup> In the Northern Circars, this mutual dependence reached another level when the native groups targeted colonists and missionaries alike.<sup>15</sup>

In the Northern Circars, missionaries recognized that their presence was dependent on the fortunes of the *Raj* and hence considered any opposition to the latter as a challenge to them. Recalling the political mood of the 1920s almost three decades later, Mary S. McLaurin, who was born in Samarlakota to a Canadian Baptist missionary couple and later served as a missionary, described the political situation as “troubling.”<sup>16</sup> She admitted that the missionaries were “anxious” at the political “unrest.” Annie E. Sanford, an American Lutheran, reporting of the bubbling noncooperation movement led by Gandhi, conceded that it “may affect” their work “somewhat.”<sup>17</sup>

Given this threat perception, some missionaries were hesitant to report details of their work among women even to their readers in North America, lest the nationalist foes intercept the information and punish the converts. Jessie Brewer, an American Lutheran, in her half-yearly newsletter, for example, preferred to publish a biographical sketch of Pandita Ramabai instead of recounting her work at Mangalamandiram, Guntur.<sup>18</sup> She lamented that it was not conducive to “publish very much about the Bible School (for Women)” given the political “unrest” in the region. Brewer did not want to incite nationalist fighters, as a “goodly number” of the pupils were converts from Hinduism.<sup>19</sup> She rightly identified the “political unrest” of “nationalist” groups as a backlash against the group conversions that had taken place in the region a few years earlier. The changing status of women aided by missionary interventions, according to her, provoked violent resistance from nationalist groups.

The response of the missionaries to the political aspirations of the local groups was not limited to fear and concealed reporting. Caught amidst the Rampa Rebellion in 1919, Clara Mason, a Canadian Baptist single woman in Narsipatnam, sought and found shelter with

local British officials whose “gracious rule” she extolled.<sup>20</sup> The Rampa Rebellion, a series of guerilla wars in revolt against the land policies of British administrators in Madras Presidency during the first quarter of the twentieth century, especially between 1922 and 1924, was led by Alluri Sitarama Raju, an influential Sudhra.<sup>21</sup> Mason criticized Sitarama Raju for organizing guerilla armies against the British soldiers and their Indian collaborators. Sitarama Raju, according to Mason, misled the “simple and trustful” warriors from the hills with “deceit and hypocrisy.”<sup>22</sup> Given their attachment to the empire and apprehensions about nationalist struggles, many missionaries thus became vocal in their criticism against anti-British activists.

This critical attitude of missionaries to the aspirations of some groups for political freedom was evident further in their response toward Mohandas Gandhi.<sup>23</sup> A Canadian Baptist missionary bureaucrat echoed a similar resentment against Gandhi, calling him a “dictator” and “second Mussolini.”<sup>24</sup> Gandhi’s antagonism to the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries might have provoked their anger. Even the admirers of Gandhi in the region were apprehensive of his attitudes toward religious conversions. For example, writing in the first half of the 1930s, Flora Clarke, a professed admirer of Gandhi, expressed her hope that the “true statesman” in him would not hinder missionary activities.<sup>25</sup> Thus the hostility of missionaries toward regional and national leaders may have emerged out of latter’s antiforeign and anti-conversion ideologies.

Given a growing sense of doubt about the longevity of the *Raj* and challenges from the freedom fighters, missionaries had to rethink their strategies. Some decided to limit their activities to mission compounds and to share more administrative responsibilities with the natives. While many male missionaries wanted to strengthen the native church, especially through devolution and ecumenical conversations, missionary matrons promoted the leadership of native women in the spread of Christianity.

### Waves of Sudhra Conversions to Protestant Christianity

The 1920s are also notable for the renewed interest of some Sudhra communities in Christianity. A few Sudhra groups had earlier converted to the Catholic tradition in the first half of the eighteenth century, mostly as clusters of families. Protestant missionaries, who had hardly stimulated any interest in Christianity among the Sudhras over the first hundred years of their activities, began to welcome Sudhra communities into their churches in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Jarrell W. Pickett, in his seminal 1933 book, *Christian Mass Movements in India*, acknowledged this sudden and massive upsurge of interest among the Sudhras in Christianity.<sup>26</sup> In this report, summarizing the findings of a survey undertaken by the National Christian Council of India, Pickett estimated that at least 15,000 Sudhras had converted between 1928 and 1932 in the six mission stations that his team studied.<sup>27</sup> The aspiration of the Sudhras for social improvement, according to him, was one of the motives behind the conversions.<sup>28</sup> In what can be called an epilogue to his earlier book, Pickett added that Biblewomen were responsible for these mass conversions, especially among the Telugus.<sup>29</sup> Pickett's statistics acknowledge the emerging interest of Sudhra communities in Christianity. They also reveal the missionary eagerness to foster Sudhra conversions, especially through Biblewomen. As I will discuss later in the chapter, this missionary enthusiasm in Sudhra conversions impacted many of the practices of Biblewomen during this period.

Protestant missionaries and local leaders working among the Telugus eagerly welcomed the phenomenon. W. J. T. Small, a British missionary visitor, celebrated the emerging "caste" movement in Medak in the late 1920s. He rejoiced at the "increasing friendliness" and "deep interest" of Sudhras and more so at the rapidity of their conversions.<sup>30</sup> Of the 7,596 baptisms recorded in 1930, about half involved were of Sudhras, according to him.<sup>31</sup> Frank Whittaker, a missionary in the Nizam's Dominion, reported on a similar movement there among the Sudhras.<sup>32</sup> Coauthoring a book with Henry Whitehead, then bishop of Madras Diocese, Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah, the bishop of Dornakal diocese, welcomed the conversion of Sudhra communities and advised missionaries to invest their resources in the movement.<sup>33</sup>

There was a similar movement in the coastal districts as well. Mrs. Calvin F. Kuder, a missionary wife at Rajahmundry, for example, proudly informed her readers about the "increasing number" of Sudhra conversions, beginning in 1929.<sup>34</sup> It was for the first time that American Lutheran missionaries reported on "high caste" conversions to Christianity. Missionaries often referred to the Sudhras as "high" castes, as the latter dominated the social life in the Telugu society as a landowning class and ranked above the Dalits in the Brahminical social hierarchy. American Lutheran missionaries responded to this heightened interest among the Sudhras by appointing more Biblewomen. While there were only 113 Biblewomen working with American Lutherans in 1920, the number increased to 217 by 1930, a growth rate of 92 percent.<sup>35</sup>

As I will discuss later in the chapter, the conversions of Sudhras did not bring in many Sudhra women to the profession. But they certainly turned the attention of missionaries and native evangelists toward the Christianization of Sudhras, resulting in significant adjustments in the lifestyles and strategies of Biblewomen.

### New Institutions of Higher Education

The establishment of institutions of higher education and professional training in the region influenced the dominant patterns by which Biblewomen were trained. Within a span of eight years, pioneer universities were founded in the state of Hyderabad and in the Northern Circars. In the state of Hyderabad, the seventh nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, founded Osmania University in 1919.<sup>36</sup> Eight years later, the Madras Presidency constituted Andhra University in the Northern Circars.<sup>37</sup> The Andhra Christian College, which American Lutherans had founded, was upgraded to the first grade and was made an affiliate of Andhra University when the latter was formed in 1927.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, within the realm of professional training, the colonial administration in the presidency founded Andhra Medical College in 1923.<sup>39</sup> Protestant missionaries contributed to this trend by starting their own training programs. In 1919, Hilma Levine and Anna Neudoerffer, American Lutheran missionaries, for example, started a training school for nurses in Rajahmundry.<sup>40</sup> Laura Allyn, a Canadian Baptist, founded a School of Nursing in Pithapuram the following year. In the field of teaching, Canadian Baptists founded the Jubilee Teacher Training School for Women in Kakinada in 1929. This pattern of offering on-campus formal education would begin to affect the way missionaries trained Biblewomen as well.

In summary, a changing political climate affected the modus operandi of the missionaries. Nationalist struggles, Sudhra conversions, and changing modes of professional training in the region together would shape how Biblewomen were trained, practiced their mission, related to their employers, and approached their clients. The way Biblewomen perceived their mission did not alter much but how they practiced it did. The mode of training and the ethnic outlook of the profession would change considerably. The following discussion will analyze how a changed social and political context affected the ministerial office of Biblewoman in the region.

### MISSION AND MOTIVES

Biblewomen continued to perceive their mission much as they did in the previous period. Mission, according to them, included the

teaching of literacy, comforting those who are hurting, and seeking conversions to Christianity. As specializations emerged, Biblewomen continued to teach children but mostly outside of school contexts. Hospitals continued to be points of contact but more Biblewomen served as evangelists than nurses.

Unfortunately, there is not much written evidence available to reconstruct the mission perceptions of Biblewomen except the application forms that three Biblewomen, who worked with Canadian Baptists, completed after their training.<sup>41</sup> As part of the placement process, missionaries at ERYBTS required their graduating students to state their choice of ministry and the motives behind it. As a response, graduating students specified which context they would wish to be placed in. Selecting from these statements, Winnifred Eaton, founding principal of ERYBTS, publicized the motives of three Biblewomen in her annual report. Two of these were cited from application forms written ten years earlier. The selected motives aimed at demonstrating the breadth of work that Biblewomen engaged in. They do not indicate any radical changes in how Biblewomen perceived and practiced their mission.

The following are the mission motives that Eaton publicized: (1) Suvarna, mentioned earlier, vowed “to share the blessings” she received from the gospel; (2) Venkayamma dedicated herself “to give guidance and comfort to the hospital patients and their assembled relatives”;<sup>42</sup> and (3) Jogulamma, who graduated in 1932, wished “to serve those who are fallen in sin, knowing nothing of the Savior.”<sup>43</sup>

As expected, these motives primarily addressed the concerns of missionary employers and sought to convince them to locate the prospective Biblewomen in ministries of their choice. Missionaries, in turn, reported these thoughts to their donors and well-wishers in order to assure them that their generous gifts were not wasted but served their shared missionary agenda. The reported motives, therefore, reflect the mission theology of the missionaries and their compatriots at home. However, there is little in the practices of Biblewomen to contest the notion that the applicants themselves also held these views with strong personal conviction.

All three women just cited access to certain comforts or blessings that they possess by virtue of their faith in Christ. They also express their eagerness to share these benefits with their neighbors. The first two motives suggest that the Biblewomen continued to hold on to a holistic view of mission. The oath of Suvarna to share the blessings she received is broad and open to multiple interpretations. Suvarna graduated from the women’s seminary in 1924 and so was one of the institute’s earliest

graduates. Suvarna, whose earlier name was Dhalamma,<sup>44</sup> was a Dalit. As mentioned earlier, she fled her family to escape a proposed marriage with her brother-in-law. She eventually married a man of her own choice. Although she joined the seminary as an illiterate, she was acclaimed for having learned to read both Telugu and English in two years. She was also introduced to the mission ideology of British evangelicals, such as Florence Nightingale, the pioneer British nurse.<sup>45</sup> It is likely that she perceived her freedom of choice, possession of reading skills, new social status, and changed life style as blessings worth sharing with her compatriots.

The desire of Venkayamma to “give guidance and comfort to the hospital patients and their assembled relatives” likewise resonates with a holistic view of mission.<sup>46</sup> Venkayamma, a contemporary of Suvarna, may have viewed preaching to the sick as her calling. Graduating in 1924, a time when the boundaries between the different professions gradually were becoming clearer, Venkayamma overtly hinted to her future employers that her calling was to be a preacher in a hospital context.

Jogulamma’s professed motive of serving those “fallen in sin, knowing nothing of the Savior” signals the continued interest of Biblewomen in seeking conversions. Jogulamma graduated from the seminary in 1932, a time when growing resentment against the proselytizing activities of missionaries and native Christians was at its zenith. At the national level, the period was marked by repeated attempts to discourage religious conversions on the part of the INC, led by Mohandas Gandhi, to which I referred earlier in this chapter. At the same time, Dalit conversions to other religions were at a peak. Bhimrao R. Ambedkar, a Dalit leader, in 1935 declared that he, along with millions of Dalits, were ready to embrace an alternative religion that assured social equality and dignity to its adherents. The enthusiasm of Jogulamma in seeking conversions to Christianity needs to be seen in this social and political climate. Moreover, having converted from caste roots, she may have been zealous to invite her community to Christianity. She shared with many missionaries the belief that those who did not believe in Jesus were fallen and needed to be rescued. This conversionist aspect of mission, however, was not new to the period 1922–1947 nor did it preclude other dimensions of mission.

As the above motives indicate, a broad view of mission still continued in this period. As in the previous period, hospitals or schools continued to be mission contexts for the Telugu Biblewomen, although not many served as nurses and schoolteachers, as the latter two categories of appointment grew to be specialized professions.

## TRAINING FOR HOME AND VILLAGE

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Biblewomen earlier apprenticed with missionary mentors individually or in groups. Some of them were trained in Bible training centers attached to one or another of the girls' schools. A few had been employed because of their special gifts of public speaking or Scripture-memorizing, while many acquired some of the skills needed for church work as wives of native preachers.

The idea of training recruits in residence with a planned curriculum is the one of the most significant changes to have occurred in this period. In order to train new recruits, Canadian Baptist missionaries and American Lutherans each founded a Bible training school for women in the early 1920s. The practice of recruiting a woman first and then training her did not alter. But unlike the previous period, when individuals or guilds of gifted and enthusiastic women were trained while at work, Biblewomen now were trained in classroom settings for one to three years in residence before being permanently stationed in their work places.

Most of the Biblewomen in the Northern Circars, especially with Baptist and Lutheran missionaries, attended one of two training centers: Eva Rose York Bible Training School (ERYBTS) and Charlotte Swanson Memorial Bible Training School (CSMBTS). There were occasions when Plymouth Brethren Biblewomen also attended the ERYBTS, although we do not know if it was a regular practice among the Brethren. One can therefore conclude that these two seminaries, their curricula, teachers, and teaching strategies played a significant part in the professional formation of Telugu Biblewomen in the second quarter of the century.

### The Founding of Bible Training Schools for Women

Canadian Baptist missionaries founded the Bible Training School for Women in Palakonda in 1922 and then relocated it to Tuni three years later.<sup>47</sup> The town of Tuni geographically connected the territories where Baptist missionaries from the Maritime Provinces and the provinces of Ontario and Quebec were at work. The seminary was named after Eva Rose York, a major donor from Toronto. Apart from a furlough in 1934, Winnifred Eaton served as its principal until 1942, when she was succeeded by her colleague Mattie Curry.

Meanwhile, in 1926, Augustana Lutheran missionaries from the United States founded the CSMBTS in Rajahmundry. With

Table 4.1 Comparison of subjects offered in various seminaries

Lutheran Men's Seminary <sup>a</sup>	Union Baptist Seminary <sup>b</sup>	Union Baptist Seminary (Courses for Women) <sup>c</sup>	ERYBTS <sup>d</sup>
Bible	Bible Theology	Bible	Bible
Ethics	Ethics		
Church History	Church History		Church History
Homiletics	Homiletics		
Christian Education	Sunday Teaching	Sunday School Teaching	Christian Education
Evangelism			
Liturgy			Hymns
Creeds/Catechism		Sewing Hygiene & Sanitation	Sewing Pastoral Care
	Comparative Religions		Comparative Religions
		Child Training Physical Culture	
Carpentry			
Cultivation			Knitting
		Physiology & First Aid	

<sup>a</sup>Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 100–101.

<sup>b</sup>The *Union Baptist Theological Seminary, Ramapatnam, South India: Jubilee Memorial, 1874–1924, and Seminary Catalogue, 1924* (Cuttack: Mission Press, 1924), 54–55. Hereafter, *Union Baptist Theological Seminary*.

<sup>c</sup>*Union Baptist Theological Seminary*, 55.

<sup>d</sup>See James Taneti, “Baptist Women and Women’s Emancipation in Andhra Pradesh, South India” (ThM thesis, Western Theological Seminary, 2006), 75.

the founding of this school, the less extensive training program at Mangalamandiram, Guntur, was suspended. Missionaries named the school after Charlotte Swenson, the pioneer single woman missionary from the Augustana Synod. Swenson served in Rajahmundry for 13 years from 1895. Christina Eriksson was the founding principal of the school for two years before her compatriot Ruth H. Swanson took over in 1928 and provided leadership until 1951.

The training usually lasted two years for recruits who were literate and had passed elementary school. An additional year of preparation was provided to those without any reading skills. If a student decided to drop out at the end of the junior level, she was awarded a Lower Elementary School certificate. Those who went on to complete the

senior level received a Higher Elementary School certificate. A candidate usually was given a placement if she received either of these certificates. A failure to earn a certificate did not, however, automatically deny one a placement, as “faithfulness” was sometimes substituted for the successful completion.<sup>48</sup> In any case, the new recruits were still required to reside in these training schools to prove their eligibility for the job.

Compared to the previous period, the time spent in classroom learning was significantly higher. Missionaries and their native colleagues offered classroom instruction four days a week—Monday through Thursday. Practical programs, such as village camping, Sunday school teaching, and house visiting, continued on the other three days a week. As part of their field education, trainees taught children literacy and Bible classes in the neighborhood every Thursday evening.<sup>49</sup> Residing in an adjacent village during the weekends, they returned to the seminary on Sundays to attend worship service. Thus, compared to the first phase, the time spent on the field was considerably less.

Students were reported to have pleaded for more time for field education, which missionaries were reluctant to give.<sup>50</sup> Missionary records from the period, unfortunately, do not indicate precisely why missionaries refused to give more time for practical work. Needless to say, seminaries with classrooms were built primarily to provide on-campus instruction. Missionaries were also imitating the mode of instruction then used in nursing and teaching schools. The instruction of reading and biblical subjects would have necessitated a classroom environment. Missionary matrons may also have been thinking of the stigma attached to the life outside the compound walls. As I will discuss shortly, missionaries were preparing Biblewomen to be respected by Sudhras.

Certain evangelistic practices, such as house visitation and Sunday school teaching, required on-field engagement. Thus, at least three days a week, Biblewomen toured villages and traversed streets, teaching and preaching among women and children. The nature of work required these continued travels over the weekend and overnight stays away from campus.

### Curricular Objectives

A comparison of the courses offered in the 1920s in select men’s and women’s seminaries, as listed in the chart 1 in the preceding page, helps in understanding the emphasis missionaries teachers placed in ministerial formation of Biblewomen.<sup>51</sup> There were some common subjects but missionaries offered more home-based skills and practices to women compared to men.

*“The Explanation of Your Word Gives Light”*

As it was in the past, the profession continued to center around the Bible. The motto of the ERYBTS, “The Explanation of Your Word Gives Light,” illustrates the centrality of Scripture in the training program.<sup>52</sup> The teaching design at ERYBTS included survey courses in the Bible, such as Life of Christ, Hebrew Scripture, and New Testament.<sup>53</sup> The use of pictorial representations of the gospel stories prepared by the United Bible Society of India<sup>54</sup> reveals that teachers were more interested in introducing students to biblical stories than in surveying the biblical books, as the Mennonites did,<sup>55</sup> or familiarizing students to the biblical world and the process of canonization, as Lutherans did, in their men’s seminaries.<sup>56</sup> The difference in the strategy of instruction employed may have emerged out of the view of some Western missionaries that women were not capable of analyzing and comprehending texts as men were.<sup>57</sup> But the practice of learning the Bible through stories prepared the new recruits to remember and relate the same in their preaching. Learning through pictorial representations also may have permitted space for imagination. Moreover, Biblewomen used similar strategies in teaching their clients.

Memorizing scriptural passages was another common strategy used for learning the Bible. In fact, a number of missionaries hailed the skills of Telugus in memorizing. While some believed that the practice of memorizing could impede a student’s ability to “think” and “ask the reason why” in the process of learning, they often nevertheless encouraged their students to memorize biblical texts.<sup>58</sup> This practice of memorizing biblical passages was not unique to the women’s seminaries, as the male seminarians at Lutherford used the same learning tool.<sup>59</sup>

The practice of memorization may have reduced opportunities for students to think independently. As Ann Douglas has argued, expecting students to know the world by rote may have denied students opportunities to challenge the social order.<sup>60</sup> In the case of the Bible, which both teachers and students considered to be divinely revealed and hence unchangeable, there was, however, little hesitation to continue this practice. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was comparable to the practice of memorizing sacred Vedas among the Hindus. It certainly was helpful to students in their interpretation of Scripture.<sup>61</sup>

As if a comprehensive course on the life of Christ would not suffice, Canadian Baptist missionaries found and showed Christ on every page of the Bible. According to a report from Laura Bain, a Canadian Baptist, students exclaimed, “no matter what the subject, no matter

what book we study, in every class we learn about Jesus.”<sup>62</sup> American Lutheran missionaries shared this Christ-centered approach to the study of the Bible, as the motto of CSMBTS, “We would see Jesus,” suggests. Christina Eriksson had chosen the phrase, drawn from the Gospel story in which Hellenist seekers came asking the disciples if they could see Jesus.<sup>63</sup> This aim of showing Jesus through the pages of the Bible as part of their training was in line with the primary task of a Biblewoman—to introduce Christ to her hearers.

Comparative religions and church history were two other subjects to have found their place in the curriculum at ERYBTS. While the former put Christian beliefs in comparison with those of Hinduism and Islam, the latter surveyed the history of Christianity. To strengthen ministerial skills, missionaries also offered practical subjects such as Sunday school teaching, pastoral care, and hymns. Eaton herself taught subjects such as evangelism, literacy, and the Bible.<sup>64</sup> A few Biblewomen at CSMBTS learned Urdu in preparation for preaching among Muslim women.<sup>65</sup>

Extra-biblical subjects and texts, however, were clearly secondary to the Bible, which missionaries typically considered to be their primary textbook. All these subjects pointed to Christ and were aimed to train students in evangelistic skills. Biblical subjects, church history, Sunday school teaching, and evangelistic methods were common to men and women. But compared to the number of biblical subjects offered in a men’s seminary, those in a women’s seminary were fewer.<sup>66</sup> Male seminarians had the luxury of taking several subjects that introduced biblical themes, structure, canonization, and book surveys.

### *Learning to Read*

As in the previous phase, women of diverse educational levels, whether highly literate, absolutely illiterate, or somewhere in between, found this profession to be a viable vocation. At the upper end of this scale, for example, Namburi Suvisesham, who worked with American Lutheran missionaries, joined the profession after 13 years in a teaching career.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, Bandaaru Salome was chosen to be a Biblewoman in 1918 after serving as a schoolteacher for 16 years.<sup>68</sup> Thus, some highly literate women joined the office.

Several other applicants were reported to be completely illiterate. For example, at ERYBTS, 11 of the 15 students admitted in 1922 could not read.<sup>69</sup> The number of literate recruits gradually increased in the 1930s.<sup>70</sup> While not many applicants in the 1920s had completed the fifth grade, nearly half of the recruits in 1930 had completed the eighth grade (third form). On the whole, the school remained open

to the idea of admitting students from a pool of applicants with a little or no schooling, “starting at the very bottom of the ladder.”<sup>71</sup>

The enrolled students without skills to read learned the 3 R’s—reading, writing, and arithmetic—for one year before the “real Bible course” started. Since it was difficult to teach students of varied levels at the same time, Eaton encouraged the senior students to teach their colleagues in the preparatory class.<sup>72</sup> Teaching their fellow students might have been an educational experience for the senior students, as they were also required to teach reading skills to children in the neighborhood and adjacent villages. With this strategy of literate students teaching their fellow students to read, missionaries ensured that most of the Biblewomen were literate when they left the seminary, even if they dropped out after a year of training.

This stress on literacy was part of a missionary strategy with social implications for the status of Biblewomen. In a culture in which literacy was a social weapon and the dominant segments fortified their supremacy by denying some social groups opportunities to learn literacy, Dalits and women would have desired reading skills to seek social leverage. Within a few years of their arrival in the region, missionaries discerned a “craze” for literacy, especially among the Dalits.<sup>73</sup> Traditionally, Brahmin men demanded deference through their ability to read sacred texts and legal deeds. Biblewomen, who were denied opportunities to learn reading on account of their birth as women and/or as Dalits, sought skills that would earn them social respect. The “larger education” offered in the seminary aimed at enabling Biblewomen to be “well received” in Hindu homes, as Mattie Curry noted.<sup>74</sup> This demand for social respect would have been essential in the context of heightening interest in Christianity among Sudhra families.

### *Home Sciences*

As the chart suggests, the course offerings in women’s seminaries gave emphasis to skills and practices that are centered on the home. A concern for hygiene, care for the sick, and skills in sewing distinguished the curricula of women’s seminaries from those of men.

A missionary concern for hygiene was not entirely new or limited to women’s seminaries. For instance, John McLaurin, during his tenure at Baptist Theological Seminary (for men), insisted that his students learn to “wash” their faces, “comb” their hair, and “keep” their clothes clean before learning about Christianity.<sup>75</sup> This emphasis on personal hygiene may have emerged out of an evangelical view of “cleanliness” as emblematic of an inward conversion, as I alluded to

in the second chapter. Therefore, in addition to cultivating an interior conversion of individuals, missionaries insisted on hygienic practices.

Missionaries, however, especially focused their teaching of cleanliness on the wives of male seminarians. For example, Mary McLaurin, a missionary wife at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Samarlakota, specialized in teaching the wives of seminarians to keep their homes “clean” and babies “washed.”<sup>76</sup> At Ramayapatnam, the wives of seminary students were offered special courses on hygiene, sanitation, and “physical culture” during their first year.<sup>77</sup>

At ERYBTS, as part of teaching hygiene, Eaton instituted an annual award for “neatness” for a student who kept her dormitory room clean. The minute rules in regard to housekeeping were earlier implemented in the female seminaries in North America. At the pioneering Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, Mary Lyon, its founder, introduced a regime of keeping the rooms clean and practicing frugality.<sup>78</sup> This stress on hygienic practices to women may have emerged out of a missionary view that home was the immediate context of cleanliness and woman its maker. As exemplars of the Christian home, the onus was on Biblewomen and the wives of ministers to model cleanliness as a visible marker of the Christian lifestyle.<sup>79</sup>

Missionary insistence on new hygiene practices might not have been a unilateral imposition from abroad on the trainees. In the dominant Telugu culture, enrolled students were despised on two counts. By gender, they were women. By social location, most of them were Dalits. Given its patriarchal nature, the Brahminical culture considered women impure because of their ability to procreate. In an attempt to challenge as well as to comply with the system, Sudhra women emulated some practices of the priestly castes, such as regular ritual baths. The Brahminical social structure assigned Dalits occupations related to agriculture, leather, and scavenging in order to reinforce the stigma of ritual “impurity” and physical “uncleanliness.” The dominant, especially the Brahmins, claiming to be born purer, measured their cleanliness with the number of baths per day.<sup>80</sup> In this context of competing claims of purity and superiority, Dalit women in the seminaries might have found the “hygienic” practices of missionary culture helpful in their negotiation for a better status in the social ladder.

The course offerings included home-based industrial skills, such as knitting and sewing at ERYBTS,<sup>81</sup> and gardening, dairy, poultry-raising, and lace-making at CSMBTS. Although the teaching of industrial skills was not limited to women’s seminaries, the skills imparted in men’s seminaries were different. Missionaries taught carpentry and

cultivation (as if Telugu men did not know it) in men's seminaries. Instruction in subjects such as lace-making in the women's seminaries may reveal missionary anticipation of an emerging class of women with increased leisure and confined to home, just like their sisters in North America. It also attests to the tendency of some missionaries to further confine women to the domestic realm.<sup>82</sup> Some might look at this part of the Biblewomen's curriculum and conclude with Ann Douglas that missionaries were dispensing an "education for exile."<sup>83</sup> Analyzing the nineteenth-century practices of educating women in New England, Douglas characterizes the education of women as an act of preparation for economic and cultural exile. Women were educated to be "homemakers." Female academies engaged their pupils in the study of modern languages, sewing, music, literature, history, and geography, which according to Douglas, were not as "masculine" as subjects such as mathematics, theology, Greek, and the natural sciences.<sup>84</sup> Douglas's analysis does help us to understand the worldview of the missionary teachers who prepared the curricula and envisioned their graduates to be homemakers.<sup>85</sup>

However, the skills the missionaries offered, whether intended or not, also prepared their trainees for self-reliance in a context where women could not usually engage in economic transactions, especially with those outside their families. By learning to procure raw material, produce marketable items, and sell them to outside customers, women secured opportunities to go beyond the bounds of home.<sup>86</sup> These skills and the confidence that came therewith enabled them to be economically self-reliant and thereby less dependent on their men. Thus, the teaching of these home-binding skills proved to be empowering.

On the practical level, the decision to teach industrial skills in a seminary had reasons other than strengthening gender stereotypes, although it may have contributed to the latter. For example, men at the Baptist Theological Seminary learned the art of cooking. Missionaries, who initially paid monthly stipends to each family or student, changed their mind and required men to produce rice and vegetables as well as cook for the seminary community. Men also did laundry and learned carpentry, trades only select castes could engage in. The economic self-sufficiency of the school or the teaching of thriftiness may have been a factor in requiring students in learn and engage in these trades.

The pattern of requiring students to perform housekeeping tasks existed in North American female seminaries, such as Mount Holyoke Female Seminary.<sup>87</sup> Mary Lyon, for example, insisted that

students manage housekeeping activities. In all these schools, gender, no doubt, played a role in assigning the roles. Women were not taught carpentry or men sewing. But the teaching of these industrial skills did not necessarily aim to cement the existing gender or caste stereotypes as much as it arose from a missionary concern for self-sufficiency in the seminaries.

In the case of the ERYBTS, the school had no other maintenance staff except a nanny who walked children to school and babysat infants when mothers were in class.<sup>88</sup> The nanny also attended to the daily chores of missionary matrons. Students, therefore, had to fulfill daily tasks, such as cleaning the campus and cooking for the community, just as their male counterparts did in their seminary. Students received an advance to buy food supplies. They cooked their own food and submitted accounts every month.<sup>89</sup> Cleaning or cooking by students reduced the expenses that employing maintenance staff would have incurred and thereby lessened the financial burden on the school management. The teaching of home-based skills in many ways reveals a missionary view of womanhood based on homemaking. At the same time, in this context, it also prepared them for lives beyond the home. While the former reinforced the existing gender stereotypes among Sudhras whose conversions missionaries and Biblewomen were seeking, the latter expanded their roles and took them out from homes to their clients.

## NEW PATTERNS OF RELATIONSHIP

Biblewomen in this period seldom lived in mission compounds. In their preaching tours, they were less frequently accompanied by missionaries. The modifications made in their touring practices indicate changes in how the Biblewomen related to their employers. This period also opened up more avenues for the participation of native women in the recruiting, training, and paying of Biblewomen.

### Away from Missionary Employers

The mission compounds were no longer abodes for Telugu Biblewomen in this period, as missionaries placed them in church centers “whenever possible” for the efficient use of personnel.<sup>90</sup> Only those with special needs or superior skills were retained on seminary campuses or in mission institutions. This gradual weaning from direct missionary supervision decreased the numbers of meetings and frequency of reporting.

Stationed away from mission compounds and placed where they could preach in a cluster of villages, Biblewomen increasingly toured and preached without missionaries at their side. The practice of visiting without missionaries was not completely new but its frequency increased after 1922.<sup>91</sup> Instead of accompanying missionaries, Biblewomen, in this period, accompanied one another in their tours and house visits.

Biblewomen could tour independently because their missionary employers allowed them to do so. At least two factors contributed to this missionary trust in Biblewomen. First, missionary teachers themselves had formally trained the new Biblewomen for two or three years. This period of mentorship gave them confidence in the abilities of their graduates. In addition, those who continued from the previous period were senior enough to be experts in the trade. Second, most Biblewomen appointed in this period were second-generation Christians. Out of around 140 Biblewomen appointed in the period by Canadian Baptist missionaries, for example, at least 85 had a biblical or Anglo-Saxon name. Only ten have been identified as caste converts. One appears to be from the Savara community, an indigenous group in the hills. A few might have been given a Christian or an Anglo-Saxon name at the time of conversion or baptism but most would have been named by Christian parents. Looking at the names, it is safe to conclude that most of these women grew up in Christian families and were acquainted with missionaries and evangelical faith. These women did not have to explore the minds of or guess the expectations of their employers as much as their predecessors did. For their part, the missionaries were aware of the Christian nurture these women had received from their childhood.

There were other practical reasons behind the missionary willingness to let Biblewomen go without them. First, given the antiforeign sentiments churning during this phase, missionaries as a group were less enthusiastic about traveling outside the mission compounds. Second, an increase in the number of mission schools and hospitals further necessitated their presence in the compounds. Third, Biblewomen were more acquainted with the local congregations and communities than their employers or male colleagues were. Indeed, the period that a typical Biblewoman worked in a locale was usually longer than that of any single woman missionary or male pastor.

### **But Still Accountable to Missionaries**

Working away from or traveling without employers did not mean complete autonomy. Indeed, during this phase, some missionaries expressed a desire to “consolidate” the work already done and “insure”

this process through the continued education of Biblewomen.<sup>92</sup> In order to ensure this process, a missionary employer would occasionally visit the workplace and accompany Biblewomen in their visits.<sup>93</sup> Monthly conferences, which also coincided with pay time, likewise brought missionaries and Biblewomen together on a regular basis. Such meetings were typically held either in the mission compound or at one of the “outstations” where Biblewomen worked.<sup>94</sup> Annual refresher courses also occasioned continued interactions between missionaries and Biblewomen. During these meetings, missionaries lectured on subjects such as teacher personality, evangelism, home life, children’s schools, Christian doctrine, health, and adult literacy.<sup>95</sup> Missionaries thus continued to influence the faith and professional formation of their employees through these occasional conferences.

Biblewomen, on a monthly basis, reported the number of houses visited, people met, children taught, and women Christianized. With the power to hire and fire, missionaries regulated a Biblewoman’s freedom. Since missionaries paid a major portion of the salary, Biblewomen had to depend on their masters. This relationship of patronage and dependence could cross generations, as missionaries employed spouses, children, and the parents of some Biblewomen.

Biblewomen often traveled as a team of two with another Biblewoman. The practice of traveling as a pair may have served two purposes. One, it provided mutual support and training. Second, it would have reduced room for potential rumors and risks. A woman who traveled alone was often vulnerable to suspicion and gossip.<sup>96</sup>

### **Mentored by Telugu “Assistant” Teachers**

Space for the participation of native instructors, especially during the training period, also considerably changed. With the founding of the seminaries, the number of enrolling students increased but not that of single women missionaries arriving in the region. Subsequently, Telugu teachers outnumbered their Western counterparts in the women’s seminaries. For example, in its first 20 years, the teaching staff at the ERYBTS included five Canadian and fifteen Telugu teachers.<sup>97</sup> The native faculty included G. Amelia Choudhari, K. Elizabeth, T. Nancy, R. Ruth, Vasa Sarah, Emily Gopal Rao, Juvvanapudi Santoshamma, Degala Karuna, T. Dhana Joseph, M. Dheena, D. Daisy, T. Victoria, P. Vanibhai, Georgina Calvin, and Katherine Benjamin. K. Deenamma, N. Chilakamma, A. Mary, and Gidla Manikyam were on the faculty at CSMBTS. The imbalance between the number of students and available single missionaries might have forced missionaries to employ

native teachers. An abundance of qualified local teachers may also have contributed to the willingness of the missionaries to add natives to their teaching staff.

At least four credentials would have earned the native teachers this opportunity to teach at the seminaries. First, having grown up in Christian homes, the native teachers acquired an ability to oscillate between two cultural worlds. A closer look at the names of the native teachers attests to their Christian roots. The names of at least 13 of the 15 native teachers at ERYBTS bear Christian resemblance. While names such as Elizabeth and Ruth have biblical origins, those such as Emily, Daisy, Victoria, and Katherine sound very Anglo-Saxon. Parents would have chosen these names for their daughters to distinguish them from their Dalit and Hindu neighbors and so develop a distinct identity. It is also likely that some parents named their daughters after a missionary to mark friendship with or admiration for that missionary. For example, Katherine Benjamin may have been named after Katherine McLaurin, a single woman missionary. Parents sometimes named a child after someone they wished would continue to be active in their child's life. Meanwhile, names such as Santoshamma (Joy) and Karuna (Compassion) show us that some of those children grew up in families where parents were eager to inculcate biblical virtues in their children and at the same time were inclined toward native naming patterns. In any case, the parents who named these teachers were Christians and these teachers were not new to the faith they were teaching.

Second, most of the Bible teachers were not strangers to the trade either. At least two of them grew up in families where one of the parents was a Christian preacher. Amelia Choudhari was the daughter of Sayamma, one of the earliest Biblewomen. Her father was an evangelist. Vanibhai's father P. V. George was a pastor. The husbands of two others were on the missionary roll. Vasa Sarah was the widow of Abraham, a teacher from Kakinada.<sup>98</sup> The deceased husband of Katherine Benjamin, another widow-teacher, had been a pastor in Kakinada. Having been in the families of ministers or other mission workers, these women were well-acquainted with the profession for which they were training their students.

Third, in addition to knowledge about the faith and the Christian ministry, most of the local teachers were educated in mission schools, although their educational levels varied. Many of them had attended a Bible training school. At least eight of the fifteen teachers graduated from the ERYBTS. Katherine Benjamin, who was recruited in the late 1930s, for example, completed her Higher Elementary Training in

1935. Having completed the Secondary School Leaving Certificate, Dhana from Avanigadda and Vanibhai enrolled with advanced standing and completed the Higher Elementary Training in one year.

A few of them were trained teachers. For example, Emily Gopal Rao, who was appointed in the second half of the 1940s, was a qualified teacher. She also attended a Bible Institute in North India.<sup>99</sup> She was appointed an assistant principal, due to her teacher training and fluency in English.<sup>100</sup> Trained with teaching skills in these seminaries, the native teachers were able to teach literacy at the preparatory level, although it may not have been the only subject they taught.<sup>101</sup>

Fourth, having studied at these seminaries, they were acquainted with missionary matrons and their culture. T. Nancy and R. Ruth, the earliest native teachers at ERYBTS, graduated in 1924 and were appointed due to their relationship with the missionaries.<sup>102</sup> Ruth from Bheemunipatnam impressed her employers with her “command of English.”<sup>103</sup> She earlier attended the Vinukonda Bible Training School founded by American Baptists.<sup>104</sup> There, Ruth found favor with Clara Mason. Likewise, Juvvanapudi Santoshamma, who graduated in 1924, was recommended by Bessie Lockhart. Dr. Gertrude Hulet also took a personal interest in her appointment.

### **Accountable to Local Women**

The relationships of Biblewomen with local congregations changed considerably during this period. Stationed in the church centers, Biblewomen were more accessible to groups of local Christians than missionaries had been. With missionary furloughs every seventh year and some limitations on missionary travel outside of mission compounds, native Christians increasingly looked to Biblewomen as models in matters of faith and piety.

Biblewomen, for their part, were accountable to these local congregations, as the latter recruited them and indirectly contributed to their salaries. Women’s associations in the fields nominated prospective Biblewomen to be trained by missionaries.<sup>105</sup> After graduation, they required them to return to the field and work closely with local congregations. Appointment to one’s home village was less likely, as familiarity could hurt the possibility of securing admittance into caste homes. Hindu families would not welcome a Mala or Madiga Biblewoman from their own village because they were aware of her social identity. Biblewomen thus often worked in villages adjacent to their birthplace but still in their fields. Whenever a Biblewoman migrated from her hometown, the host church was responsible for providing her with

housing and moral support. Some Biblewomen lived in their villages and commuted to their workplaces.<sup>106</sup> If they stayed away in their workplace for a night, they often found shelter in a school or church or in a colleague's home. Local women's groups might also contribute a small portion of the salary. Therefore, Biblewomen were accountable also to the local women in their field and not only the single woman missionary in charge of the field.

## SEEKING SOCIAL RESPECT THROUGH HOMEMAKING

A portrait of the ERYBTS with seven pictures illustrates the making of a home at the seminary. While two pictures show women sewing and knitting, two depict students sweeping the campus. One scene shows a woman cooking and another portrays two students engaged in a group study. The picture in the center focuses on two mothers playing with their children while others watched. This portrait, photographed and arranged by missionaries, illustrates how missionaries included children within the broader environment of the training process.<sup>107</sup> Missionaries during this phase did not seem to have found family cares to be a hurdle in their work as much as they did in the past. Instead, they viewed family life as integral to the job of a Biblewoman.

### Seminary as Home

Most of the incoming students came either single or with children. Many of those with children were widowed. R. Shanta, for example, arrived with two sons, while Manikyam came with four daughters.<sup>108</sup> S. Gnanavathi joined the seminary with two sons in 1928.<sup>109</sup> M. Martha, one of the earliest students, who left the seminary in the 1920s to marry, returned to the seminary in 1948 with "several" children after her husband died.<sup>110</sup> Having left their homes, these Biblewomen lived in the seminary community, some for one year and many for three years. Depending on the number of students and space available, two or three single students shared a room, while mothers with children lived in separate rooms. In any case, the seminaries were not generational ghettos with women of a similar age but proved to be extended families with women and children of all ages.

During the period of training, children of school age might be admitted into the boarding school at Tuni.<sup>111</sup> Some children who lived with their mothers might have walked to an adjacent mission school. The ERYBTS had a kindergarten for infants. As mentioned earlier,

there was a resident nanny there to walk children to school and watch infants while mothers attended classes or toured. After their mothers were given placements, children typically followed their mothers to the workplace and studied in mission schools wherever their mothers worked. Thus, neither during the training nor while doing their work were Biblewomen required to abandon their children in order to pursue this career. In fact, the maternal duties of the single parents often expanded in the absence of extended families, which had once shared the responsibilities of parenting. It was not unusual to find widowed mothers single-handedly parenting their children.

After training, most graduates married. According to a roll of employees dating to 1951, 81 Biblewomen were employed by the Canadian Baptist Mission. Of the 49 Biblewomen whose marital status is recorded, 22 were widowed and 23 married, while just 4 remained single. Missionaries interpreted the decision of a Biblewoman to remain single as a “special” calling. The ministry of R. Ruth, one of the earliest graduates, was acclaimed as a “special line of service.”<sup>112</sup> She was appointed an instructor at the seminary. Tholeti Rebecca, another spinster, was employed as a nonteaching “staff” member at the seminary. Employing the single women in the seminary itself was a pragmatic move. Not many Hindu families would welcome a single woman visitor. An unmarried woman was likely to attract more gossip than her married colleagues. Sunnapu Santoshamma, who worked in Srikakulam, and Dokuburra Ruth, a Madiga from Kakinada, were the only known single women to be placed outside the seminary campus during this period.<sup>113</sup> Ruth remained single because of a “deformity.”<sup>114</sup> She, however, adopted her niece Mary as a daughter, forming her own family.<sup>115</sup> Thus except for a very few, most of the Biblewomen chose to marry after their training program.

### Marriage as a Strategy

Missionaries were less critical in this period toward the family cares of Biblewomen. Their enthusiasm to find social respect for their Biblewomen and thereby admittance into Sudhra homes may have mellowed their critical attitudes to family commitments. Most missionaries were aware that remaining single was a “deviation” according to Telugu cultural norms.<sup>116</sup> An unmarried Biblewoman’s visits to Hindu homes could have been considered a threat in Hindu families, although most men were outside their homes during the day when Biblewomen visited. Missionaries, therefore, viewed the marriage of female preachers to be strategically important for the spread of

Christianity. The silence of missionaries about marriages of widowed Biblewomen and the reluctance of the latter to remarry even when their own Dalit cultures permitted the practice and some Brahmin dissenters promoted remarriage of widows, attest to the tendency of missionaries and Biblewomen to emulate Sanskritic practices for the sake of social respect.<sup>117</sup> It would have been easier for single widows to find acceptance in Hindu society than for remarried widows.

This same need for respectability also might have influenced the way Biblewomen found partners. Biblewomen in most cases allowed their parents to “arrange” a mate, as was customary among the Telugus. Missionaries would have collaborated with parents in arranging these marriages, as in many cases, both, or at least one of the two partners were their employees. Some missionaries were not shy about suggesting names of potential partners to families in order to ensure that converts did not marry non-Christian spouses.<sup>118</sup> In this way, they might have influenced the choices of mates but would not have imposed their preferences.<sup>119</sup> The influencing of marital choices might have occurred more among the orphans living in missionary homes than among the Biblewomen.<sup>120</sup> Getting a man or woman married was a family’s responsibility and a missionary would not have had an opportunity to veto a family’s choice. In either case, career interests and a desire for social acceptability played larger role in the choice of mates than missionary tastes.

Even while participating in weddings arranged by the parents, missionaries were not enthusiastic about reporting these. Instead, they mostly reported wedding stories in which a bride and groom had made a choice about her mate with no consent of parents, characterizing them as “Christian marriage.” Their silence cannot be interpreted as their disregard for weddings arranged according to the local customs. Rather, weddings where bride and groom took personal initiative would have been reported, as these could be more intelligible to their Canadian readers.<sup>121</sup> Both weddings, that is, of Hariamma and Suvarna, which missionaries enthusiastically reported, highlight the element of choice. In each case, the parents were not Christians. The parents of Hariamma, who were Kshatriyas, objected to her marriage as she was a widow and her groom a widower, an idea completely unacceptable in their community. Suvarna had earlier left her family in protest against her mother’s choice of a mate for her. Other reported prearranged marriages usually were attributed to the families that did not convert to Christianity and the choices they made would hurt the Christian practices of the Biblewoman.<sup>122</sup> These cases were a few exceptions to the usual pattern of finding

mates and arranging weddings. Very few Biblewomen would have married without parental consent or arrangement, as it would undercut the social respect they were seeking and the mission they were engaged in.

Most Biblewomen found their mates from the missionary payroll, unlike other Telugu women who were more likely to follow the local custom of marrying their cousins. Of the 62 women who graduated from the ERYBTS in the institution's first eight years, 35 were recruited as Biblewomen. Of these, 18 women married pastors and schoolteachers employed by the Canadian Baptists. Kathy Benjamin, for example, married a pastor in Kakinada<sup>123</sup> as did Varahalu.<sup>124</sup> Leela and B. Ratnamma were wives of schoolteachers.<sup>125</sup> T. Deenaratnamma married a schoolteacher who later became a pastor.<sup>126</sup> P. Krupa married a butler in a mission bungalow.<sup>127</sup> Finding a mate within the mission infrastructure was mutually beneficial, as it did not disturb a Biblewoman's profession or that of her husband. Thus, professional interests could play a major part in choice of husbands. A desire for social respect among the Hindu communities significantly influenced how Biblewomen followed the local customs in getting married.



Figure 4.1 Telugu Biblewomen with Canadian Baptist missionaries.

## THE SOCIAL FABRIC OF THE PROFESSION

The social outlook of the profession in the region changed considerably. The Sudhra conversions altered the social composition of the Protestant Christianity in the region but not of the office. They, however, influenced how Telugu Biblewomen presented themselves to their clients.

### Numerical Dominance of Dalits

Unlike the previous period (1880–1921), the social fabric of the Biblewomen’s profession during this period was less diverse. If the social identities of the students of the ERYBTS are any indication, the following statistics illustrate the social makeup of the profession. Of the 142 students who underwent training between 1922 and 1947 and whose names are mentioned in missionary records, only 9 were caste women.<sup>128</sup> Caroline Lewis was one of the very few Anglo-Indian recruits.<sup>129</sup> The social backgrounds of the Telugu Lutheran Biblewomen were not too different. Of the 33 Biblewomen whose social identities are identified in the Lutheran missionary records, only 5 were of caste origins.<sup>130</sup> There would not have been many more Sudhras in any case, as missionaries seldom failed to identify the social location of a caste woman and often were silent about the identity of Dalit women. In all likelihood, they would have chosen to identify these women in order to assure their donors that not all students were “untouchables” and that there were some Sudhra converts in their ranks. Thus, as the above numbers attest, Dalit women far outnumbered their Sudhra counterparts despite the emerging Sudhra movements toward Christianity and persistent missionary interest in Sudhra conversions.

### Why not More Sudhras?

Unlike many schools, churches, and hospitals, which were located mostly at the outskirts or in the Dalit hamlets or near cantonments, both of the women’s seminaries discussed previously were deliberately placed in non-Dalit neighborhoods to attract caste women to the profession. It might also give the trainees easier admission to caste homes. For example, the ERYBTS was built on a site granted by a local princess, Rani Subadhramma, who hoped that the proposed structure would foster women’s empowerment.<sup>131</sup> The location was within a Kshatriya neighborhood. Like their Canadian Baptist counterparts, American Lutherans placed the CSMBTS in a strategic place. At its inception, the CSMBTS was located at the Alcot Gardens,

a nonresidential locale on the banks of River Godavari between a Freemason club, patronized by the native king, and a tobacco company. It was founded in the mission hospital compound and as an attachment to Dorca's Industrial School, a skill training center for women. The CSMBTS was later moved to a hill where pilgrim-monks would wander by after their sacred bath in the river. In contrast, the Baptist men's seminary at Samarlakota was constructed in a cantonment area, a site gifted to the missionaries by the Maharajah of Pithapuram. It was later moved to the sea shore in Kakinada where fishing communities lived.

This special interest in Biblewomen of caste background is evident again in the autobiography of Flora Clarke, a Canadian Baptist single woman. Clarke, who hardly mentioned the names of other Biblewomen, devoted considerable space in reporting about Sooramma, a Brahmin.<sup>132</sup> Archibald Mabel, a colleague of Clarke, celebrated Sooramma's ability to use the Biblical verses "with power" despite being illiterate.<sup>133</sup> Clarke held Sooramma in "high esteem" and increased her salary even when missionary wages were cut.<sup>134</sup> Missionary reporters compared Sooramma to Pandita Ramabai of Maharashtra because of their Brahmin origins. In contrast, the names of Dalit Biblewomen only briefly pop up and disappear in the missionary records.

Why was it, despite missionary enthusiasm to enlist caste women and the increasing number of Sudhra converts to Christianity, that not many women of caste background showed an interest in the profession? There are at least four possible answers to this.

First, unlike Dalits, who embraced Christianity as clusters of families, Sudhras converted as individuals or nuclear families, often provoking the anger of their caste group. By choosing to become a Christian or worse, a Biblewoman, a woman risked complete dislocation from her social group. The following cases of Rajabullamma, Neela, and Soubhagyam attest to this danger:

- Rajabullamma, a Sudhra widow, who enrolled at ERYBTS in 1936, heard about Christianity through a group of Biblewomen and decided to become a Christian.<sup>135</sup> She had to run away from her in-laws' house in order to join the seminary.
- Neela from Bheemunipatnam, who joined the ERYBTS in 1934, despite having sympathetic siblings, had to flee from her family.<sup>136</sup> She heard a Christian song and received a pamphlet with a Christian message from a group of Biblewomen. Her brother, who was sympathetic to the Christian faith, read the pamphlet to her.

She decided to convert but her parents warned her against such a move, as it would be a disgrace to the family. Neela escaped to join the seminary, quietly followed by her sister, Chandramma.

- Soubhagyam, who worked American Lutherans, was another to have deserted her family upon her conversion.<sup>137</sup> Widowed young in life, she had a daughter. As was customary, she lived with her in-laws. When her daughter was admitted to the Guntur Hospital, Soubhagyam came with her. Hearing about Christianity at the hospital, Soubhagyam decided to convert in its favor. Disowned by her in-laws, she found shelter in the Convert's Home at Guntur, which was established by American Lutheran missionaries.

Second, missionaries, who by and large found the religious and cultural practices of the Telugu women incompatible with the outlook of evangelical Christianity, demanded a complete break with the past. Given the missionary emphasis on being grafted into the new community, a caste woman often had to choose between her family and the new faith. Some Telugu women, who at first found loyalty to two worldviews possible, eventually accepted the missionary view.

The conversion account of Makovali Sooramma, a Brahmin Biblewoman appointed during the first period, illustrates this conflict of theologies. Sooramma, wife of Seetharamayya, opposed her husband's decision to become a Christian.<sup>138</sup> The event resonates well with the missionary portraits of native women as custodians of tradition, real hurdles to the Christianization of the community, and, at the same time, potential catalysts of change. Initially, fear of being ostracized by the community or being identified with Christian "dogs," a title designated for Dalits, would have deterred Sooramma from becoming a Christian.<sup>139</sup> Perhaps love for her deities caused her first to oppose her husband's decision. Sooramma, who initially "left" her husband, after a period of negotiation, agreed to join her husband "only if" she was allowed to worship her deities, a gesture that signaled both continuity and change in her worldview.<sup>140</sup> Her decision to join her husband expressed a belief that it was possible for members of two religious affiliations or worldviews to live in harmony in a family and that each family member had the right to worship the god(s) of his/her choice. Later, Sooramma decided to worship Christ but retained her *bottu*, the mark on her forehead, both to respect her marriage with Seetharamayya and also to identify herself with her Hindu community. She identified herself with both religions for 20 years until "the Word of God," as interpreted by the

missionaries, “got into her head.”<sup>141</sup> With her decision to give up the *bottu*, the only but very significant marker of her association with her Hindu family, her “surrender” to Christianity was “complete,” triumphant missionaries declared.<sup>142</sup> The missionary insistence on dislocation from Hindu families and complete discontinuity with the past would have stifled the enthusiasm of many caste women from joining the profession.

Third, a women’s choice to convert and to become a preacher potentially had adverse implications not only for herself but for the entire family. Most of the Sudhra women who chose to become Biblewomen were widowed and had no prospects of remarriage. However, among the caste families, a woman’s leaving home dampened the marriage prospects of both the one who left and her sisters. By connecting with Dalit communities, a completely unacceptable gesture, Biblewomen might further diminish the marriage prospects of their sisters, even if the latter remained faithful Hindus completely rooted in their families.

Fourth, the Biblewoman’s career demanded house visitations and a certain amount of travel across and within the village. It also involved visiting Dalit homes. As explained in the preceding chapter, physical mobility across and within the villages was discouraged. Women converts of Sudhra origins may not have been enthusiastic about adding one more source of stigma to their collection.

Dalit women, on the other hand, had more incentives to enter the profession and fewer obstacles. In most cases, they had the consent, and even the encouragement, of their families. The admission of Laura Devanandam reveals this pattern.<sup>143</sup> While Devanandam was contemplating which career to choose, her parents, who were Christians, advised her to consider a career as a Biblewoman. Named after Laura Bain, a Canadian teacher at ERYBTS, she preferred to become a Biblewoman. Joy, who worked with American Lutheran missionaries, is another such woman known to have come to the profession with the encouragement of her parents.<sup>144</sup> In another case, K. Annamma, a Dalit woman, joined the ERYBTS in 1932, encouraged by her husband.<sup>145</sup> While she prepared to become a Biblewoman, her husband studied to be a teacher in a mission school in Kakinada.

Suvarna was the only Dalit Biblewoman reported to have fled from her family. She did so neither to convert nor to become a Biblewoman but to evade her mother’s choice of mate.<sup>146</sup> Her mother engaged Suvarna to her brother-in-law when her sister failed to give birth to an heir for him. After completing her training, she married a man of her “choice.”<sup>147</sup>

In the case of Dalits, a career as a Biblewoman could brighten a woman's prospects of marriage. Young women in Christian families considered the profession a worthy career to pursue for Dalit women. Monthly wages provided Biblewomen with financial stability. Prospective men would have found advantages in an earning wife who could also teach children. Instead of uprooting a woman from the community, the Biblewoman's career earned social standing for Dalit women.

Thus, despite an increase in the number of Sudhras entering in the Christian community for the 1920s and high missionary interest in Sudhra conversions, the profession, in the second phase (1922–1947), became predominantly Dalit. The risks of persecution, inevitable dislocations from family, potential damage to the social standing of siblings, the social stigma attached to life away from home necessitated by residential training, and association with Dalits while at work were some of the major factors restraining the interest of Sudhras in the profession. In contrast, the possibility of increasing respect and support from the family encouraged many Dalits to enter this ministry.



Figure 4.2 Two Lutheran Biblewomen.

### Wearing White and Looking Ascetic

In this period, Telugu Biblewomen—married, widowed, and single alike—wore white. The missionary literature does not indicate, however, when this became a common practice in the region. At least by 1930, the wearing of a white saree and a white mull blouse had become a regular pattern among the Biblewomen.<sup>148</sup>

Many photographs from the first phase also portray many Biblewomen in white sarees. But there were other pictures of Biblewomen wearing colorful sarees. It is probable that the Biblewomen who were widowed wore white sarees, as it was customary for widows in Telugu society. Married Telugu women, on the other hand, were expected to wear colorful sarees as a mark of respect to their husbands as long as the latter were alive.

In the 1920s, Anna S. Kugler, a medical missionary, rightly interpreted the white saree as a marker for widows. Referring to the attire of Soubhagyam in a picture taken before 1928, Kugler suggested that a white saree indicated the former's marital status as a widow.<sup>149</sup> Soubhagyam, a widow, wore a white saree even before it had become a uniform. Likewise, the pictures of Biblewomen in white sarees taken in the first phase would have been those of widowed women.

But most of the pictures taken after 1930 attest that Biblewomen, by and large, married or widowed, wore white sarees. One might wonder that in a context where Biblewomen were imitating their Sudhra sisters for the sake of respect, why would they wear the white saree even when their husbands were alive. According to Eaton, white symbolized protection and witness.<sup>150</sup> She added that wearing white was the choice of the Biblewomen themselves. However, she mentions little to explain why white epitomized protection and witness. Nowhere did the Biblewomen expound on why they wore white and what role it played in their visits.

Eliza Kent, who studied the practices of Tamil Biblewomen, offers a feasible explanation. According to her, a white saree presented the Biblewoman as “asexual and ascetic.”<sup>151</sup> This is in line with Telugu culture, which required widows to wear white sarees. According to this thinking, the choice of a white saree for Biblewomen indicated their eagerness to look modest and sexually less threatening to their hosts, although most men were outside their homes during the day when Biblewomen visited. By wearing white, Biblewomen ensured that they presented themselves as ascetic.

This may also have been a strategy to distinguish themselves from Dalit priestesses, especially basavis or devadasis.<sup>152</sup> Ritually married

to the deity, devadasis or basavis lived in temple premises.<sup>153</sup> Drawn from a Dalit community, they were required to set themselves apart, sometimes against the will of their parents and their own will, for the purpose of providing sexual gratification for caste men.<sup>154</sup> The sexual unions with devadasis (meaning servants of the Lord), were assumed to have religious significance. The female offspring from such unions were destined to inherit this office from their mothers. A conversation recorded by John Carman, an American Baptist missionary in Hanumakonda, reveals the tendency of some natives to compare Biblewomen with this group of women. When introduced as women devoted to religious work, other women inquired if the Biblewomen were devadasis.<sup>155</sup> In order to avoid comparisons with this group of priestesses, Biblewomen may have preferred a color that presented them as holy and ascetic. Winnifred Eaton's interpretation of white saree as a symbol of purity attests to this.<sup>156</sup>

The practice of wearing a white saree when one's husband is alive also reflects a woman's courage and a determination to challenge established cultural norms. Wearing white in a context of too many colors also distinguished them from their sisters, which missionaries might have interpreted as an act of "witness."

In summary, the "nationalist" aspirations of some native groups and subsequent challenges to missionary agendas, mass conversions of Sudhras to Christianity and missionary interest in these movements, plus changing modes of professional training in the region together shaped the development of the profession in this period. In line with other professional training programs, women missionaries established seminaries to train Biblewomen in the 1920s. Even while continuing their focus on the Bible and faith in Christ, they trained women for life both within the home and away from it. Despite the inflow of Sudhras into the church and a missionary eagerness to recruit them, Dalit women far outnumbered their Sudhra sisters in the profession. Yet, in response to the Sudhra conversions and in an attempt to foster these conversions, Telugu Biblewomen and their employers changed some of their strategies. Telugu Biblewomen, most of whom were Dalits, sought to earn the respect of their Hindu neighbors through marriages, certain practices of parenting, and an ascetic dress code.

## A LOCAL MANIFESTATION OF A GLOBAL OFFICE

The office of Biblewoman grew to be a global institution in the second half of the nineteenth century, the heyday of both colonial and missionary expansions. In their eagerness to spread the new religion, local women who had embraced evangelical Christianity in the continents of Asia, Africa, Americas, and Europe appropriated the office of Biblewoman that Protestant missionaries transported from London. The profession became an avenue through which native women exerted influence in the religious affairs of the emerging Christian communities and contributed to the spread of Christianity around the world. As the job title indicates, this ministerial office everywhere was identified with the Bible. Influenced by evangelical tradition, Biblewomen around the world also promoted social reforms and cultural changes in their own contexts, just as their predecessors in the British metropolis did. Recruitment patterns and training methods would change over the years. As the profession took root in different contexts, shaped by particular historical and social dynamics, some of its practices varied. After identifying some common characteristics of the office around the world, this chapter analyzes how and why some features of the office in the Northern Circars differed from its counterparts in other continents.

### GLOBALIZATION OF THE PROFESSION

As mentioned in the second chapter, with its accent on Scripture and eagerness to disseminate biblical knowledge around the world, the Religious Tract Society founded the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in 1804 in order to translate Scripture into different languages and coordinate its distribution. To accomplish its objective, the BFBS organized auxiliaries outside Britain. On the Indian subcontinent,

an auxiliary was instituted in Calcutta as early as 1811 and another in Bombay in 1813.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, evangelicals elsewhere in the North Atlantic region started parallel societies in their countries with similar missions. The Netherland Bible Society and American Bible Society (ABS), for example, were founded in 1814 and 1816 respectively.<sup>2</sup> These Bible societies and their auxiliaries founded outside the North Atlantic world collaborated with Protestant missionaries in translating the Bible into various languages and supplying scriptural portions to the non-Protestant world.

The British and Foreign Bible Society, which earlier had employed male colporteurs in Europe and the Americas, hired women, especially after 1857, the year in which the London Bible and Domestic Female Mission (LBDFM) was founded, to sell Bibles and other Christian literature. As noted earlier, Marian Bowers, a working-class woman of Irish descent, proposed the concept of female colportage and was appointed as the first Biblewoman.<sup>3</sup> Ellen H. Ranyard, an intermediary between the Biblewomen and the BFBS, mobilized funds for and defined the infrastructure of the profession in its embryonic stage. The BFBS later employed Biblewomen abroad and encouraged its American counterpart to do the same. Within a decade of the inception of the office of Biblewoman, Thomas Phillips, representing the BFBS at the fiftieth anniversary of the ABS, introduced this “new means of circulating” Scripture to the latter.<sup>4</sup> He advised his counterparts across the ocean to adopt this “system” that worked “admirably” and “efficiently” in the British metropolis.<sup>5</sup>

Although it is difficult to ascertain when the first appointment of a Biblewoman abroad was made, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the profession crossed the borders of Britain no later than six years after its inception. By 1863, the BFBS employed four Biblewomen in Cape Town, South Africa.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, working closely with Ellen Ranyard, Marilla B. Ingalls, an American Baptist missionary, appointed three Biblewomen in Thongze, Burma.<sup>7</sup> Ingalls depended on the generosity of her friends in the state of New York to pay these Biblewomen. Eunice K. Knapp, an American Baptist missionary in Rangoon, Burma, employed a Biblewoman among the Kemees the same year.<sup>8</sup> Local Christians under the banner of the Rangoon Burma Missionary Society contributed to the salary of this Biblewoman. Meanwhile, American Presbyterian missionaries hired a Biblewoman in Guangzhou (Canton) in 1865 and their Baptist counterparts in China appointed another in Ningpo the following year.<sup>9</sup> Thus, within a decade, the BFBS and a diverse group of missionaries

together transplanted the profession at least to Burma, South Africa, and China.

The visit of Marilla B. Ingalls, one of the earliest missionaries to recruit Biblewomen outside Britain, to London reveals the emerging networks that globalized this profession. During her visit, which had taken place before 1860, Ingalls was reported to have visited St. Giles, the birthplace of the office, and watched the work of British Biblewomen there.<sup>10</sup> Ranyard, who hosted Ingalls, acknowledged her guest's eagerness to introduce the office in Burma. This visit indicates the personal interest Ranyard took in globalizing the office and presenting the British Biblewomen as models for Biblewomen around the world. It also illustrates how some women missionaries, for their part, considered the institution in London as worth importing to their contexts. By the time Ranyard died in 1879, 34 foreign Biblewomen were on the payroll of the BFBS, scattered in India (12), Syria (6), Burma (2), Madagascar (2), Spain (2), Germany (2), France (2), Sri Lanka (1), China (1), Italy (1), Greece (1), Turkey (1), and among Hebrides in Scotland (1).<sup>11</sup>

The eagerness of the BFBS to export the office abroad outlived Ellen Ranyard. E. Selfe Leonard, a niece and the successor to Ranyard, continued to promote the activities of Biblewomen abroad. In many cases, the BFBS paid the salaries of these Biblewomen. It also contributed to the production and supply of the Bibles produced in vernacular languages.<sup>12</sup> By 1884, the number of non-British Biblewomen on the payroll of the BFBS reached 58.<sup>13</sup> Besides the BFBS or ABS, interested individuals from the North Atlantic world or native Christian communities supported the recruits.

Intensifying its efforts to globalize the office, the BFBS resolved in 1884 to partner with select missionary societies abroad. In India, these societies included, but were not limited to, the Indian Female Normal School and Instruction Society, the Society for Promoting Female Education in the East, and the Church of England Zenana Mission Society.<sup>14</sup> According to its own resolution, the BFBS offered to pay a portion of the salaries of 12 Biblewomen in each of the above-mentioned agencies for no more than two years. These societies were encouraged to find resources from other sources to sustain the office. Having undertaken to support recruits in this way, the BFBS, by 1901, was contributing toward the salaries of 658 Biblewomen overseas, working with 40 different missionary organizations.<sup>15</sup> Of these, 435 Biblewomen were located on the Indian subcontinent.

Most Protestant missionaries were evangelicals and therefore eagerly shared this stress on Scripture. Given their familiarity with local languages, many of them worked closely with the Bible societies in translating Scripture into the vernaculars of the people among whom they worked in the non-Western world.<sup>16</sup> These missionaries largely shared with the LBDFM the view that women were moral influences at home and were the channels through which families could be Christianized. They hoped that the gospel message they shared with women would eventually reach their children and husbands. When asked by a woman of Eastern Orthodox tradition in Syria about what talents she had to offer, S. Smith, a Bible agent, without hesitation assured the inquirer that the ability to listen to the Christian Scriptures and take them home to her husband and children is the greatest gift a woman might have.<sup>17</sup>

Given this view of womanhood, many Protestant missionaries employed Biblewomen, often with grants from Bible societies based in the North Atlantic region. They found the institution especially useful in communities where cultures or circumstances restricted their access to women. Having received funds from these societies toward the publication of Bibles and the salaries of Biblewomen, missionaries served as interlocutors between Biblewomen and the BFBS, sometimes via the LBDFM. As part of the partnership, they reported statistics concerning the literature distributed, people met, and houses visited, to the Bible societies annually. Occasionally, letters and journals from Biblewomen were translated into English to be published in Europe and North America.<sup>18</sup> For their part, local Christian communities—indigenous and/or colonist—patronized the ministry through moral and financial support. Of course, the transplanting and spread of the profession would not have been possible without the availability of interested native women.

## UNIVERSAL TRAITS

While appropriating the profession, Biblewomen around the world inherited some practices from their British predecessors. They improvised on others, drawing from their cultures. Despite the differences specific to each context, the profession had some recognizable common characteristics around the world. In an attempt to identify these common practices and features, I have selected the cases of Biblewomen from Britain, Burma, China, South Africa, and Zimbabwe. Since my sources are mostly secondary in nature, the following findings are preliminary and hence need further corroboration.

## A Ministry within the Protestant Tradition

The institution of Biblewoman, by and large, flourished within Protestant churches both in Europe and outside it but especially among those communities that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and whose origins trace back to the activities of Western missionaries. The Protestant emphasis on Scripture as against the Roman Catholic emphasis on liturgy and the sacraments allowed Protestant women to lay a claim on the Bible and thereby exercise their authority as preachers and teachers.

As mentioned in the second chapter, this new lay ministerial office had its critics, at least in its birthplace. First, there were suspicions in England about whether this ministry would undermine the importance of the ordained ministry and encroach on the ministry of preaching that many male clergy thought was their prerogative.<sup>19</sup> Second, even while admiring the notion of native agency in church work, some, especially the proponents of the office of parochial mission worker, doubted if a ministry that did not fit itself into the existing ecclesiastical structures could be effective. In response, British Biblewomen assuaged the fears of their critics by working closely with the male clergy, for example by inviting them to their meeting places.<sup>20</sup> Gradually, after the death of Ranyard, the LBDFM asked male Anglican clergy to take over the roles of lady superintendents, thereby seeking additional legitimacy from well-established ministerial offices. As those with evangelical convictions, Biblewomen continued to draw support for their work from the missionary obligation that they believed to be mandatory for every individual, lay or ordained, female or male.

However, there is no strong evidence to suggest that any confessional body in England incorporated this ministry into their church structure. Neither the established churches nor the nonconformist churches had appointed or paid Biblewomen from their exchequer. Instead it was para-church agencies, such as the LBDFM and BFBS, or interested individuals that patronized the profession. The nondenominational character of the office was in line with what Ranyard envisioned at its inception and resembles that of its parent organizations, the LBDFM, the BFBS, and the RTS.

It is less probable that such opposition from the denominational hierarchies to the budding ministry would have emerged in the new Protestant communities in the non-Western world, as missionaries developed it into an indispensable part of their church infrastructure. Local Christian communities, including male clergy, likewise

recognized the ministries of teaching, preaching, counseling, and modeling of Christian piety that the Biblewomen demonstrated.<sup>21</sup> The local women's associations partnered with women missionaries in recruiting, training, and paying the Biblewomen. Thus, in a world religion where men traditionally controlled the interpretation of the Scripture, the administration of sacraments, and church polity, the office opened up recognized avenues for women to minister within the Protestant community.

Most of the missionaries who introduced the office and the churches that appropriated it were evangelical in their beliefs. So were the Biblewomen they appointed. Hence, it is not surprising that Biblewomen, by and large, believed in the personal conversion of individuals, salvation available in Christ, the need to share the Christian message, and the transforming potential of the gospel. Biblewomen, in almost every context, eagerly introduced Christianity to their non-Christian neighbors and modeled Christian practice within the nascent Christian communities.

### Native Agency

With very few exceptions, the profession largely belonged to local women, who can be considered "native" in several ways. First, geographically, Biblewomen grew up in the regions where they served. Their knowledge of the land and weather helped the practice of touring, which was an integral part of the job.

Second, Biblewomen belonged to the communities they served, nurtured in the local worldviews and fluent in the native vernacular. It helped their ability to mediate between the cultural worlds of Christian missionaries and their compatriots. Biblewomen retained some of their pre-Christian customs but challenged many others. They adapted and appropriated many evangelical practices.

Sibanda, for example, who had collaborated with the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) in Zimbabwe since 1907, retained some practices from her pre-Christian cult in order to promote her new religion.<sup>22</sup> Appointed a Biblewoman in 1949, she wore a black dress and a headdress as other African women in her context did, which, according to Urban-Mead, signals a woman's subordinate status.<sup>23</sup> Her black clothes resembled those of an *amawosana* (Mwali priestess). Like contemporary Mwali priestesses, Sibanda itinerated. She remained single, as some of the adepts of the Mwali shrine did.<sup>24</sup>

Third, in many cases, Biblewomen shared the ethnic identity of their clients. Further, in contexts where their audiences were of the

same descent, they utilized family networks to introduce Christianity. The Chinese Biblewomen who worked with American Baptist missionary Adela M. Fielde, for example, are said to have visited their kin and introduced Christianity to them at mealtimes and bedtimes.<sup>25</sup>

Fourth, in some cases, the Biblewomen were not too different from their clients in regard to economic status. British Biblewomen, for example, engaged in the same trades as their neighbors. Belonging to the same class, they could claim solidarity with as well as an insight into the living conditions of the families they served.

Despite slight differences in class or ethnic identity with the local communities, Biblewomen, by and large, can be classified as native. However, there were a few minor exceptions to this universal feature, especially in the initial period. The profession in Canada is a notable exception where most Biblewomen were of European descent.<sup>26</sup> The China Inland Mission, for example, appointed Jane McLean, a Deaconess from Inverness, in 1867 in China.<sup>27</sup> British Methodists also employed a British woman in 1875 in Punjab.<sup>28</sup> The shortage of native women of Christian convictions may have caused these exceptions.

### **But Also Aliens**

Conversion to or an upbringing in Protestant Christianity, no doubt, was the most prominent difference between Biblewomen and their compatriots. While most of the earliest recruits were converts to Protestant Christianity, having abandoned their religious or confessional identities, those of the second generation more often grew up in local Christian families with evangelical convictions. Marian Bowers, the pioneer Biblewoman, for example, was a convert. She was a Catholic before her conversion to evangelical faith. The 16 Biblewomen who worked with Adela M. Fielde in Swatow region had followed either Buddhist or Confucian traditions.<sup>29</sup> In their conversion to Christianity, they adapted or appropriated the values and practices of Protestant missionaries from Europe or North America. By renouncing parts of the local culture and religion in favor of a foreign one, these women chose to be culturally alien in their native lands.

In some cases, Biblewomen were migrants from another region within the same country. The Biblewomen in the Transvaal, South Africa, for example, were as alien and native as their clients were, having migrated along with their communities to work in the mines. The experiences of British Biblewomen resonate with those in the Transvaal in some ways. Several of the first British Biblewomen

belonged to several groups that at some point had migrated from another European country, seeking employment in urban England during the nineteenth-century industrial revolution. These women eventually preached in neighborhoods inhabited by settlers of various ethnic descents.

Sarah, a Telugu, was another such woman. She migrated to Rangoon, Burma, to join her husband who was working there. After her husband died, the local congregation appointed her a Biblewoman probably in or shortly after 1892.<sup>30</sup> In such contexts, both the Biblewomen and their clients were not children of the soil. They were native only in the sense that they shared the experience of dislocation and relocation with many others in their ethnically diverse communities of service.

A few Biblewomen stepped aside from their cultural world temporarily through travel abroad, either before or after their conversion to Christianity. The Biblewomen in Swatow, for example, lived abroad temporarily and returned to their communities, in search of livelihood or to escape social pressures.<sup>31</sup> There were also rare situations when Biblewomen traveled abroad with missionaries. As mentioned in the second chapter, Krishnaalu, a Telugu woman who eventually became a Biblewoman, visited the United States in 1867.<sup>32</sup> Her daughter-in-law Sita, alias Sarah, studied in the United States before her recruitment in 1896.<sup>33</sup> Such Biblewomen were native to the land but were exposed to foreign cultures, both on account of their travel abroad and their conversion to an alien religion.

As in the case of Northern Circars, it is likely that multiple ethnic communities with conflicting social interests and distinct cultures might be living in a given region. In such situations, a Biblewoman who was native to the land might also be alien to the women living in an adjacent neighborhood. She, however, would not be as alien as those Western missionaries who came from foreign cultures and faraway countries.

In the Transvaal, the Biblewomen were alien to their clients in economic terms. Many of them were relatively affluent and/or were from ruling families in the community. For example, Elizabeth Patosi of Mafeking and Claudia Nkosi hailed from reasonably wealthy families.<sup>34</sup> Patosi, who served between 1927 and 1947, owned donkeys and acquired a cart for her missionary travels. Nkosi, who was appointed in 1929 and worked in Swaziland, was a daughter of a kraal chief.<sup>35</sup> Sarah Pike was a liquor vendor before her conversion. These women differed from their clients, who mostly worked in the mines, in terms of class.

Thus, the Biblewomen who typically shared the territory, culture, ethnic identity, and economic status of the communities they served sometimes differed from them on account of one or more of these other features. While geography connected them with their clients, culture and religion, by and large, distinguished them from the latter.

### **Diffusion of Biblical Knowledge**

The association of the office with the Bible is another significant marker. The profession shared many of the characteristics of the other offices mentioned in chapter 2, such as deaconess, mission worker, nurse, zenana worker, and teacher, but its focus on Scripture marks this particular vocation apart from all the others. This preoccupation with Scripture emerged out of a belief that the dissemination of biblical knowledge could change individuals and communities. Although Biblewomen were the female equivalents of Bible colporteurs or Bible men, the sale of Bibles was not the only activity undertaken by Biblewomen.

Biblewomen employed various strategies to make Scripture available, as different contexts demanded. While some were vendors, others were readers and/or preachers. In some contexts, Biblewomen sold Bibles and scriptural portions. The BFBS, for example, employed Biblewomen to “sell” Bibles.<sup>36</sup> British Biblewomen also engaged in explaining biblical passages in their weekly tea parties. In contexts where illiteracy was rampant, they narrated and interpreted biblical stories. The alternate titles of Scripture Reader or Bible Reader, used for Biblewomen in the Madras Presidency, for example, suggest their roles as readers and preachers of Scripture.

### **Catalysts of Social Change**

Having embraced a new religion and its value system, Biblewomen campaigned against what they perceived to be “evil” in their cultures. They promoted religious and cultural changes. Adapting the evangelical values they received from Western missionaries, Biblewomen promoted the practices of literacy, frugality, and temperance in their contexts.

Teaching literacy to help women and children read the Bible was a common strategy among the Biblewomen. While these teaching activities in Britain were limited to homes, Sunday schools, and streets, the primary schools that missionaries founded abroad provided additional

teaching opportunities for Biblewomen in the non-Western world.<sup>37</sup> As mentioned earlier, Telugu Biblewomen taught literacy in homes, in the streets, and sometimes in classroom situations.

Biblewomen also promoted temperance. As Bowers pledged in her letter of acceptance, Biblewomen had a word or two “in season for the drunken.” Having emerged from a context where gin and vodka ruled the slums and amidst the concerted efforts of evangelicals to preach teetotalism or temperance, British Biblewomen offered Bibles as an antidote to alcohol.<sup>38</sup> Emulating the volunteers in temperance societies, some of the Biblewomen carried them with temperance cards and asked their clients to sign a pledge to practice abstinence from alcohol.<sup>39</sup> Influenced by the same evangelical values, Biblewomen around the world crusaded against alcoholism. For example, Sarah Pike, a Biblewoman in the Transvaal, herself a liquor vendor before becoming a Biblewoman, advocated temperance, undercutting the very trade she once was involved in.<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Patosi of Mafeking, her compatriot, who served between 1927 and 1947, exhorted Christians in the burgeoning mining fields to shun alcohol through *manyano*, women’s associations.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to appropriating these evangelical practices, Biblewomen spoke against specific problems unique to their contexts. For example, the practice of foot-binding had been challenged by Biblewomen in the Chinese context. The impulse to seek religious and cultural changes was common among the Biblewomen. The Christianizing cum “civilizing” agenda of the Biblewomen more universally included the teaching of literacy and the promoting of temperance. It also had context-specific expressions, such as the campaign against foot-binding.

### Home as a Ministerial Context

As mentioned earlier, the office of Biblewoman was transplanted to contexts where access to women was often restricted. In Europe, the profession flourished in the urban centers, especially under the shadow of the industrial revolution. Elsewhere, it largely found its home in agrarian and semirural communities. Worldwide, it was a profession of women seeking to introduce Christianity to other women.

In some contexts indigenous worldviews supported the notion of women preachers, while in some they did not. For example, some Chinese Biblewomen had been Buddhist preachers and spirit-mediators before joining this profession.<sup>42</sup> In other situations, such as Turkey and Syria, theological resources made available in the evangelical tradition were needed to justify women’s preaching.

Women and children were the immediate focus of Biblewomen's ministrations. Visiting women in their homes, Biblewomen introduced the Christian message and evangelical practices. This focus on women might have emerged out of a belief that the home is the natural sphere of a woman's influence and that an entire family could be Christianized if its women were.

In the process, home became a sacred site where Scripture could be talked about. Through the practice of house visiting, Biblewomen carried the Bible beyond pulpits and demonstrated that women could, indeed, expound the Scriptures. They traveled with Scripture in order to visit the homes of other families, even in cultures where norms of propriety restricted women from going beyond their homes.

While home and women were the focus, home was not the only locus of their work. In streets and verandahs, Biblewomen taught Bible stories.<sup>43</sup> The schools and hospitals that missionaries started in the non-Western world provided them with opportunities to teach and preach. They preached to patients and their families at medical dispensaries, encouraging them to believe in Christ.

At its embryonic stage, the vision of Bowers included admonition of the "drunken and even the infidel" husbands.<sup>44</sup> In the Northern Circars, some Biblewomen were eulogized for their religious discourses with Brahmin priests.<sup>45</sup> Analyzing Sibanda's account of her work, Urban-Mead argues that she was "quite concerned with, and strove to achieve, the salvation of men."<sup>46</sup> Thus, although women and children received special attention, men were not completely outside the sphere of Biblewomen's activities. Construing home as the context of ministry, Biblewomen reached every member of a family.

### Professional Workers

The enthusiastic offer of Marian Bowers to be a colporteur eventually resulted in the birth of a profession. The dire need of the BFBS to market its products, the skills of the earliest Biblewomen to sell these commodities, and the organizational and literary skills of Ellen Ranyard contributed to the maturation of this idea into a full-pledged profession. The LBDFM constructed an organizational infrastructure strong enough to withstand temporary setbacks, such as a loss of personnel and finances. Like many other professions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the services and time of Biblewomen might be remunerated either in cash or in kind (more Bibles to sell).

Although the processes and conditions varied according to each context, the employers, either missionaries or local churches, had

a definite process of recruiting and training personnel. They also provided continuing education to their employees.

As would be expected for any remunerated vocation, there was a system of mutual accountability. Biblewomen in the Northern Circars, Swatow, and Transvaal reported both to Western missionaries and to women in their congregations, as the latter also contributed to their wages.<sup>47</sup> British Biblewomen, on the other hand, reported to volunteer superintendents assigned by the LBDFM.<sup>48</sup> Among the Telugus, native Christian women associations nominated candidates for the office and influenced their placements, although missionaries could veto their decisions. With defined processes of recruitment, training, remuneration, and accountability, the career as Biblewoman could be considered a profession.

### Patterns of Training

Recruiting a woman and teaching her the work as an apprentice was the most common method of training in the initial years. For example, in London, a recruit was required to accompany her senior colleague for a short period before undertaking work in her assigned district. The lady superintendent in charge of the Biblewoman then would continue to tutor the latter as and when necessary. Given her experience in Bible circulation, Ranyard herself trained the new recruits at Mission House. She organized weekly meetings with Biblewomen when she taught Bible stories to her trainees. The new recruits were reported to have “marked, learned, and inwardly digested” her rendering of Scripture.<sup>49</sup>

In contexts where missionaries introduced the office, they undertook the responsibility of training the new Biblewomen. In China, Adela Field, for example, gathered a group of 16 women and trained them.<sup>50</sup> As mentioned in the third chapter, missionaries in the Northern Circars likewise gathered teams of Biblewomen in order to train them, before placing them in different locations. There were also several instances when woman missionaries trained a new Biblewoman on an individual basis.

This pattern of preparing Biblewomen as individuals and in small groups eventually was replaced by more formal programs of training. Myfanwy Wood, an LMS missionary in the Siaochang district of China between 1908 and 1951, for example, founded a training school for Biblewomen in 1910. The training lasted for three years, with six-month periods of residence each year. Trainees could spend up to six months every year with their families during the harvest season, that is, between October and March, an arrangement that

allowed them to contribute to their family's income and, at the same time, voluntarily to engage in preaching.<sup>51</sup>

This shift in training patterns was present also in South Africa. There British Methodist missionaries first trained Biblewomen individually. They then trained them along with male seminarians at Lovedale Bible School, which was founded in 1932.<sup>52</sup> Missionaries eventually added a separate center to train prospective Biblewomen in 1945. The shift in London, from the pattern of training individual recruits to more formal programs of training, replicated worldwide, contributed to the further professionalization of the office.<sup>53</sup> The pace of change might vary according to local circumstances but the trajectory of the shift seems to be consistent on a global scale.

### APPROPRIATED IN ANDHRA

Missionaries introduced the office among the Telugus in the 1870s, although it did not reach the Northern Circars until 1880. As mentioned in the second chapter, Lydia was appointed a Bible Reader by 1869 and Martha was working in Kadapa from 1873. By 1880, Harriamma, Papamma, and Pantagani Annamma were working with Canadian Baptist missionaries in the coastal districts, while Kaveramma, Ratnamma, and Charlotte were employed by the CMS missionaries.

As the ministerial office of Biblewoman was transplanted to various milieus, local needs and cultural factors contributed to the process of its appropriation. Telugu Biblewomen shared all of the above-mentioned universal features. As in other regions of the world, it was a ministry of native women established within Protestant communities. The dissemination of biblical knowledge was the primary concern of the ministry. Biblewomen, to some extent, challenged local customs and sought conversions to Christianity. Homes continued to be the primary contexts of their ministry. However, there were some variances in the Northern Circars, especially with regard to the nature of their employment, the age of the recruits, and the travel patterns, as socio-political dynamics impacted the appropriation of the profession in the region. What follows is a brief description of the contextual variances I see occurring in the coastal districts, starting with those that were relatively minor and ending with the most significant differences.

### Women Lay Evangelists

As in other places, Protestant communities and missionaries in the Northern Circars looked to Biblewomen for the teaching of Scripture and the demonstration of Christian piety. The ministry

flourished among the Telugu Baptist and Lutheran communities. Working closely with the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society (CEZMS), CMS missionaries adopted two different offices: the zenana worker and Biblewoman. While the former focused on caste women, especially in teaching literacy, Biblewomen introduced Christianity to women irrespective of their social location. The affiliation of the CMS missionaries with the CEZMS and their traditional interest in the “high” castes might have caused this approach. On the other hand, the Lutheran and Baptist women missionaries, originating from North America and arriving after the birth of the Biblewomen movement, appointed native women for the purpose of reaching women of both caste and outcaste origins, fostering more social interaction between these sections of Indian society. Plymouth Brethren missionaries, who campaigned against the dominance of the ordained ministry and advocated an egalitarian polity, also adopted the institution.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the office, to varying degrees, found acceptance within a broad Protestant community.

Like their counterparts elsewhere, it was a ministry of women and primarily among women. Telugu Biblewomen visited houses or gathered women in streets in order to introduce the new religion. They met with both Christian and non-Christian women and offered lessons about hygiene and temperance. Teaching women new skills, such as sewing, was part of their ministry. They also extended their ministrations to children, teaching the latter biblical stories and alphabets.

### **Narrating Biblical Stories**

In their visitations, Telugu Biblewomen told Bible stories and sang the Christian message. These methods connected them to their counterparts in Asia and Africa. Although it was not as prominent as it was in Britain, the sale or gift of Bibles and Christian literature was not completely absent in the Northern Circars. Baptist and Lutheran missionaries in the region often employed male colporteurs to market scriptural pamphlets. Colporteurs mostly focused on the literate, either in the administrative centers or in business centers of a city. Biblewomen did sell Christian literature but their market was limited to hospitals.<sup>55</sup> Given the amount of illiteracy in rural Andhra, especially among women, as well as the inability of rural women to purchase books, Biblewomen would more often have narrated biblical stories instead of selling scriptural portions.

The singing of the gospel message was another common practice among Telugu Biblewomen. Songs attracted audiences and sustained

their interest. By these means especially, Biblewomen hoped to commit the gospel message to the memory of their hearers. In the Northern Circars, singing bridged social barriers and defied gender and caste restrictions.

### **Native but Alien**

Telugu Biblewomen were born and raised up in the Northern Circars. They spoke a colloquial form of Telugu that would have been intelligible to native women. Culturally, although most of the Biblewomen were Dalits and had their distinctive culture, they were aware of the Sanskritic norms that dominated Telugu culture.

Unlike some of their counterparts elsewhere, the visitations of Telugu Biblewomen were not confined to the homes of their social group. Most of the Biblewomen were of Dalit descent, as was the case for the majority of the Christian community in the region. Despite the social disabilities that the caste system imposed on them, they introduced Christianity to caste women. Recruiting women of caste origins proved to be difficult, as most of them would have been reluctant to visit the homes of other families not of the same caste as themselves. Thus, in caste terms, the Biblewomen were alien to some of their clients.

Economically, a modest but regular income improved the economic conditions of the Telugu Biblewomen. In many families, this was an addition to the wages their spouses and other family members earned as evangelists, schoolteachers, and health workers. It is, however, difficult to assess where they stood in comparison to their clients, as they preached to women of all castes and classes—landowning castes as well as landless Dalit communities. Telugu Biblewomen were economically more stable than many of the women of their social group, as many of the Biblewomen were of Dalit origins. In their relation to caste women, increased income would have given them additional social leverage, although it would not have put them on a par with the landowning caste women they visited.

### **Recruited Young**

Compared to women appointed elsewhere, the recruits in the Northern Circars were younger. In the contexts surveyed above, the women employed tended to be in their middle or old age (i.e. between the thirties and sixties), especially in the early decades of its transplantation to these contexts. This was true in the case of the Biblewomen

in the Transvaal, South Africa, for example. The first few batches of women students trained at the Lovedale Bible School, founded in 1932, were largely middle aged. Most of the earliest graduates of the women's seminary founded in 1945 at Lovedale School were in their forties. The average age of the first batch, for example, was 44. With just a few exceptions, the students' ages ranged between 43 and 52 in the following year.<sup>56</sup> Within this group, Martha Matsinya of Sophia town, appointed in her late thirties, was the youngest. Georgina Makapela was the oldest. She was 60 years old at the time of her appointment.<sup>57</sup> In Zimbabwe, Sitshokupi Sibanda was named a Biblewomen in 1949 when she was around 50 years old. Citing the letters of Myfanwy Wood, a LMS missionary, Vanessa Wood states that the Chinese Biblewomen, whom Wood employed in the early twentieth century, were recruited in their forties and fifties.<sup>58</sup> One cannot assert that all women recruited in these regions were middle aged or older, given the slim evidence at hand, but the initial indications seem to point to a missionary preference for women of advanced ages or an interest on the part of the latter in the profession.

Possible reasons for such a preference or interest may have varied in the different contexts. First, it may have been that the missionaries preferred women of middle or older ages because the latter had fewer maternal commitments. Analyzing the case of Chinese Biblewomen, for example, Vanessa Wood argues that the fewer family commitments of the middle-aged women had factored into their employment.<sup>59</sup> Women with young children would not have undertaken touring for days at a time, which the job required in that context.<sup>60</sup> Studying the case of Biblewomen in the Transvaal, Deborah Gaitskell, a British historian, draws a similar conclusion. According to her, the candidates in the Transvaal had passed the age of intensive childcare at the time of application and so were free to undertake Bible work.<sup>61</sup> Second, an advanced age would have made work-related travel easier for the candidates. According to Wood, the LMS missionaries in China had intentionally recruited women above 40 years of age, as it was inappropriate for younger women to travel alone in Chinese society.<sup>62</sup> By virtue of their age, Biblewomen chaperoned schoolteachers, who were younger.<sup>63</sup> Third, an advanced age could help Biblewomen to claim respect, especially in cultures where an individual received deference on account of age. For example, Ghee Dwe, one of the earliest Biblewomen in Burma, was in her late fifties at the time of recruitment.<sup>64</sup> Writing to E. Selfe Leonard, the chief of the LBDFM, Dwe described herself as a "big mother" with a right "to reprove, to strengthen, and to teach" her clients.<sup>65</sup> Likewise,

Chinese Biblewomen utilized their age to earn respect in public life, according to Ling Oi Ki, a historian from Hong Kong.<sup>66</sup>

Younger women were recruited gradually in some regions. For example, the United Church of China in 1933 considered more seriously the longevity of an applicant in the Christian community and her interest in preaching than her age credentials.<sup>67</sup> It required recruits to be communicant members of a church for at least two years before appointment. A prospective Biblewoman also had to undergo a probationary period of one year before being admitted into the training program. The changed criterion brought more young women into the office, especially in this church. But in these cases, the pattern of recruiting young women was introduced only after some decades.

In contrast, in the Northern Circars, the profession attracted and missionaries often appointed women in their twenties and thirties. A few were appointed in their teens as well. As mentioned earlier, P. Lizamma, the youngest known recruit, was 13 years old when appointed. At the time of recruitment, G. Sayamma was 18 and Pantagani Annamma was probably 20 years old.<sup>68</sup> Beera Miriam alias Adamma, wife of Zaccheus, from Gunnanapudi was appointed in her mid-thirties.<sup>69</sup> There were older women as well but such appointments were not many. As these above-mentioned cases of the earliest Biblewomen suggest, young women showed interest in the profession right from the inception of the office in the region and missionaries indeed preferred “educated young women,” as they needed Biblewomen who could also serve as schoolteachers.<sup>70</sup>

Why would more young women show such unparalleled enthusiasm to join the profession in the Northern Circars? First, as mentioned in the second chapter, Telugu Biblewomen had smoothly synchronized their commitments to work and family. It would have been possible for these young Biblewomen to parent, as the husbands of many of them also worked for missionaries and would have understood their schedules. When housed in the mission compound, there were colleagues to watch children and schools for children to attend, and while away in the villages, extended families may have helped in caring for the children. Moreover, travel patterns that did not take them too far from home made it possible for young Biblewomen to parent their children.

Second, Telugu Biblewomen used their ability to read and their children’s education as social tools to earn respect in a society where most of them were deprived of both literacy and basic human dignity because of their Dalit roots. The colonial administration worked closely with Hindu social reformers and Christian missionaries in its

educational programs. While the former catered to the educational needs of the social elite, the mission schools often became the only available options for the marginalized groups. Given their access to the mission schools, many Biblewomen found opportunities to educate their children by allying with missionaries. For example, K. Chinnamma, a Biblewoman in Tekkali, sent her daughter to mission schools. Having completed teacher's training in the Jubilee Memorial Training College in Kakinada, founded by Canadian Baptists, her daughter returned to her home town Tekkali as headmistress of her alma mater, a mission school.<sup>71</sup> Having studied in a mission school, Venkayamma's son later joined a mission hospital as a pharmacist.<sup>72</sup> These opportunities to study and engage in professions of their choice in a context where local customs limited the educational opportunities of these oppressed groups may have encouraged young women to join the profession. Thus, in the Northern Circars, having children was not necessarily a hurdle but rather could be a motivating factor.

Third, as in Burmese society and many other places, Telugus do pay deference to a person of an older age. However, a young woman preacher would not attract contempt on the virtue of her age, as women of all ages could be active in religious leadership. Most Dalit families, especially those belonging to the Matangi tradition, usually consecrated (or were forced to set aside) a girl for sacred purposes in their childhood.<sup>73</sup> At the demise of the reigning Matangi, Madiga families in a village sent their daughters, usually between the ages of eight and ten, to be chosen as the incumbent priestess. The community consecrated a girl on whom the goddess descended and who successfully passed the test of self-control.<sup>74</sup> These girls were active in cultic leadership even before their marriage. Thus, the sight of a young female preacher would not have been a complete shock to Telugus, especially to those of Dalit roots. Moreover, the social respect they were likely to lose on the account of their young age was compensated for by their mastery of a sacred text and an ability to speak for God.

Fourth, as I will shortly mention, fulltime employment secured additional, though modest, income for the families. A career as a Biblewoman was one of the earliest socially acceptable professions that provided women with wages in cash. Although bread-winning for the family was not entirely new to Dalit women, earning in cash was. It provided them with standing in a changing economic culture where cash replaced commodities such as grains and clothes. As mentioned earlier, improved economic status, even to a limited extent, gave the Biblewomen bargaining power in their approach to and interactions with their men and the caste women they visited.

### **Employed Full time**

The nature of the employment of Biblewomen in the coastal districts also was different when compared to the cases considered above from China, Britain, and Burma. According to Wood, as mentioned earlier, Biblewomen in Siaochang district of China were employed for only a part of the year. They worked in the agricultural fields during the harvest season, that is, October to March.<sup>75</sup> In other regions of the country, a few, whose husbands worked full time for the mission institutions, had “volunteered” or were not paid.<sup>76</sup> The practice of working part time may have existed in Burma as well. For example, Mah Piu Oo, a Burmese Biblewoman worked for six months in a year.<sup>77</sup> Although their work lasted throughout the year, Biblewomen in and around London were hired on an hourly basis. For example, Bowers was paid 10 shillings per week for the few hours (2 to 3 hours) she spent on her Bible work each day.<sup>78</sup> British Biblewomen often continued their previous trades to sustain themselves. The work of Telugu Biblewomen, in contrast, was neither seasonal nor part time. Missionaries could not dispense with Biblewomen, as the schools and hospitals in which Biblewomen worked were open throughout the year.

Thus, access to educational opportunities for them as well for as their children and an ability to earn additional income for the families drew young women to the profession. Given their ability to harmonize professional and family demands, maternal responsibilities did not deter their interest in this career. Age seems to have been neither a deterrent nor an incentive for any woman willing to defy the cultural restrictions then in force within the Northern Circars.

### **Transgressing Social Boundaries**

To spread biblical knowledge, Biblewomen toured and visited homes. Travel among the kraals, for example, was a prominent practice of Biblewomen in the Transvaal. In this case, touring often was limited to Christian communities perceived not to be active in evangelical faith and practice. Edith Mgabhi, a Swazi appointed in 1924, was the earliest Biblewoman in the region. She joined the profession with her husband’s consent and with an understanding that she would first work in Bremersdorp, her hometown, before touring the neighboring settlements, staying away overnight.<sup>79</sup> In addition to giving “simple talks” about Jesus, Mgabhi encouraged girls and young women to greater interest in evangelical practice.<sup>80</sup> As they worked among the existing Christian communities that showed declining interest in religious life, Biblewomen in the Transvaal were reminding these

communities of their religious heritage while also solidifying the community's social borders.

Analyzing some of their missionary practices, Ki concludes that the Chinese Biblewomen, whose geographical location and denominational affinity she does not identify, did not tour as much as their younger counterparts did in other regions of the world.<sup>81</sup> This was despite the fact that missionaries appeared to consider the ability and appropriateness of a candidate to travel in public when making hiring decisions. The practice of foot-binding might have contributed to this limited itinerancy.<sup>82</sup> While age gave them freedom to travel, the declining health that comes with age curtailed their physical ability for extensive touring.<sup>83</sup> When they traveled beyond their villages, they mostly visited members of their extended families to introduce the new religion.<sup>84</sup> Remaining with kin for extended periods took them away from their immediate families but not far from their ethnic groups.

In London, Biblewomen were often assigned to the neighborhood wherein they resided. Their mobility was restricted to these zones. Thus, although British Biblewomen may have visited women of other ethnicities, they did not cross class boundaries on a regular basis. Their activities were confined to their neighborhoods.

In contrast, relegated to the social margins, Telugu Biblewomen often crossed social and class barriers, traveling beyond their locales. They met women of other social groups. They toured but seldom stayed away from their immediate families for extended periods. And as observed earlier, while aspirations to end gender- and caste-based discrimination took them beyond their locales, the need for social credibility brought them back home.

### **Engineering Social Change**

Telugu Biblewomen, like their colleagues elsewhere, in addition to teaching literacy to women and children, promoted the practices of literacy, hygiene, and temperance. Lutheran Biblewomen, for example, conducted classes among women to help their men shun alcoholism. They used a study book called the "Village Series" that emphasized the importance of temperance.<sup>85</sup> Baptist Biblewomen joined their missionary employers in an awareness program carried out under the auspices of the Total Abstinence Society, which was founded by George F. Currie, a Canadian Baptist missionary, in 1876.<sup>86</sup> But their social activism was not limited to instruction regarding these practices. Compared to their British and Chinese counterparts, Telugu Biblewomen were more intentional in challenging social structures

through their visitations and preaching. While the social location of the Telugu Biblewomen may have spurred such social engineering, the cultural disruption caused by the colonial environment, Western education, and missionary interventions facilitated it.

Interest in and opportunities for challenging established social structures do not seem to have existed in London or Swatow. In Britain, for example, a clearly defined hierarchy, which ranked the Bible (City) Missionaries at the top, Bible Ladies (Superintendents) in the middle, and Biblewomen at the bottom, cemented the existing class stratification and reduced the possibilities for social maneuvering. British Biblewomen thus found themselves working with middle-class evangelical women who sought to fortify class and social distinctions, even while campaigning for violations of gender boundaries.<sup>87</sup> In Swatow, the practice of preaching the Christian message mostly to kin likewise minimized the possibility of disturbing social demarcations. Belonging to the dominant class or social elite, Biblewomen in the Transvaal would not have done much to challenge their status.

In the Northern Circars, Biblewomen worked both within and outside their communities. With a few exceptions, Biblewomen were Dalits. They served women of Dalit and caste origins, even though the latter considered them untouchable. The attempt to cross ethnic and cultural differences warranted a subtle endorsement of the status quo as well as coordinated violations of social norms.

In summary, within the Northern Circars, the office of Biblewoman shared some of the characteristics and practices of its counterparts abroad. Similar to the office in other regions, it was a Protestant phenomenon constituted of native women. Like their counterparts abroad, they hailed from their own local communities and were fluent in the vernacular language. Having converted to Protestant Christianity, they were culturally distinct from their neighbors, whom they invited to embrace the Christian faith. The dissemination of scriptural knowledge was their primary job. Under the influence of an evangelical worldview, however, Biblewomen also sought cultural changes among their compatriots, by promoting the practices of literacy, frugality, and temperance, while condemning some of the local customs they saw as evil. The spiritual and temporal welfare of women and children was a key concern and the home their primary ministerial context.

Having been impacted by the social dynamics and dominant cultural values that marked their context, the office in the Northern Circars had features that were unique to it. At the same time, some of the universal characteristics present in the coastal districts had

different social ramifications. Most of the Telugu Biblewomen were Dalits and thus were ethnically different from some of their Hindu clients. Though their roots were in Dalit culture, they were aware of the cultural idioms and behavioral patterns of the caste Hindus. Thus, Telugu women, although they were daughters of the soil, had to mediate between three worldviews—Hindu culture, a Dalit worldview, and Protestant Christianity. Although they were native to the land, the power dynamics in the region between the Biblewomen and their clients varied. While Biblewomen were from relatively more powerful and affluent families in some contexts and equal in others, Telugu Biblewomen were typically marginal by the virtue of their class and caste in relation to many of the Hindu women they visited.

A pattern of women joining the profession at relatively young ages and then working full time also marks them apart from Biblewomen in many other contexts. They found ways to harmonize their commitment to family and work and were helped to do this by the fact that most of them were married to men also working for missionaries. Educational and employment opportunities for them and their children in missionary institutions would have been another attraction. The financial and job security offered by the profession in a context of gender and caste oppression also might have attracted younger women. For younger and older women alike, the respect attached to a mastery over Scripture and some pre-Christian gender expectations may also have drawn them to choose this career.

Although the distances and time spent in their travels were limited, the transgression their physical mobility caused was socially subversive. Given their social location, Telugu Biblewomen were more intentional in defying social norms on caste and gender than their sisters abroad. Through house visitations, they blurred cultural boundaries. At the same time, through their focus on domestic life, they conformed to other cultural expectations.

## CONCLUSION

### TELUGU WOMEN IN MISSION

Inviting conversions to Christianity and promoting social changes together constituted the mission of Telugu Biblewomen. Seeking potential converts among women and children, Telugu Biblewomen introduced the Christian faith and taught literacy in houses and streets. The mission paradigms and strategies of Telugu Biblewomen, in many ways, were similar to those of the Protestant foreign women missionaries, as they, to some extent, shared the same roots in nineteenth-century evangelical Christianity. At the same time, the social dynamics of caste and gender as well as the colonial backdrop impacted how Telugu Biblewomen perceived and practiced their mission, distinguishing them not only from Western women missionaries but also from their counterparts in other regions of the world. Gender solidarity may have spurred their shared enthusiasm to challenge patriarchal values in their cultures but it did not bypass national and ethnic boundaries.

Without doubt, Telugu Biblewomen were influenced by and took advantage of the colonial disruption. But at the same time, religious beliefs played an equally pivotal role in the personal choices and communal struggles of these believers. The evangelical Christianity that missionaries introduced and Biblewomen embraced in principle recognized the human worth of every individual regardless of gender differences and mandated that all its adherents share their faith with their neighbors. The religious beliefs of Telugu Biblewomen not only legitimized their mission and social activism but also in significant ways spurred it.

The profession of Biblewoman among the Telugus was the result of a confluence of two cultural worlds. Telugu women in the coastal districts brought their pre-Christian cultic roles into Christianity.

Before conversion to Christianity, these women were active in the religious life of the community. In the Dalit tradition, women administered sacrifices on behalf of a village and uttered divine oracles. Messianic movements encouraged female preaching and the crossing of caste barriers. Although women's leadership in popular expressions of Hinduism was restricted, women could play important roles in the religious affairs of their families. As wives and mothers, some caste women had even led their families in decisions to embrace Christianity when Roman Catholic missionaries introduced Christianity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the mid-nineteenth century, when Dalits began to convert to Christianity in groups, women again played a crucial role, whether in introducing Christianity to the community, inviting their kin to the new religion, organizing congregations, or shaping the Telugu Christianity. The notion of female preaching, the practices of narrating, singing, and memorizing parts of the Bible, plus an eagerness to itinerate and cross social boundaries for religious purposes may thus have had indigenous roots.

The office of Biblewoman that Protestant missionaries introduced in the region provided Telugu Biblewomen with recognized space in which to serve, additional theological resources, and leadership practices. Having emerged in mid-nineteenth century England among evangelicals, the profession was essentially associated with Scripture. Telugu Biblewomen received this evangelical emphasis on the Bible as well as a focus on women and children. They also inherited the practices of house visitation and Scripture reading from their British counterparts.

The mass conversions of Dalits to Christianity and the cultural renaissance in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, especially in relation to the education of women, occasioned the larger context. The feminization of the Protestant missionary enterprise in this period and the needs of missionaries and native women for one another provided the context for the birth of the profession in the Northern Circars. In the first four decades, women of diverse ethnic backgrounds and educational levels showed interest in the profession. Not typical of recruitment patterns elsewhere, missionaries appointed significant numbers of young women who were in their twenties and thirties. In India, this was one of the earliest socially acceptable professions wherein women were paid in cash. Apprenticing recruits as individuals and groups was the common training practice in this period.

The founding of training schools in the early 1920s signaled the professionalization of the office of Biblewoman in the region.

Planned curricula and residential training programs distinguished the way recruits in this era were trained. Heightened nationalist sentiments, an increasing number of Sudhra conversions, and the shared interest of missionaries and Biblewomen in fostering these conversions demanded adjustments in some of the practices of Biblewomen. The fact that Dalit women outnumbered their Sudhra sisters did not entirely dalitize the profession. The need for social acceptability influenced how and why Biblewomen decided to marry, parent, and present themselves among the caste women.

In summary, Telugu Biblewomen viewed themselves as missionaries among their compatriots. Their mission activism had emerged out of a theology that, though implicit, was coherent. They saw themselves mandated to introduce Christianity to their compatriots and at the same time subtly pursue social change.

In appropriating this ministerial office, Telugu Biblewomen retained the *evangelical* emphasis on Scripture. Like their missionary collaborators and British counterparts, they believed that the diffusion of the biblical message could draw people to faith in Christ. They, therefore, narrated biblical stories, recited scriptural verses and sang biblical themes in their approach to non-Christians. In a religious context of multiple faiths, Telugu Biblewomen called for faith in Christ. Construing the sharing of their beliefs with others as a religious obligation, they introduced Christianity to their compatriots and sought conversions to Christianity. As an integral part of their evangelical practice, they also sought cultural changes in the Telugu society, primarily by teaching literacy and advocating hygiene.

Their mission theology and practices were *contextual* as well. Telugu Biblewomen had drawn from their pre-Christian worldviews the practices of female preaching and the idea of crossing of social boundaries for religious purposes. They evolved an understanding of mission that responded to their social needs. Their mission practices reflected their aspirations for social respect.

The mission ideology of Telugu Biblewomen was expansive and *subversive*, in that it included deliberate defiance of the status quo as an integral part of its practice. They mastered sacred texts and recited them, which, according to their culture, was the sole prerogative of Brahmin men. They boldly engaged in religious discussion with men as well as women. As part of their routine, they toured across the caste neighborhoods and beyond their villages. Violating social boundaries, they entered territories where most of them were considered untouchable.

The mission strategies of Telugu Biblewomen were *pragmatic*. In becoming Christians, Dalit women exchanged their religious

leadership roles in the Dalit religion by collaborating with missionaries and male evangelists. In a pursuit to imitate and earn the respect of their Hindu sisters, Biblewomen, especially in the second quarter of the twentieth century, imitated some practices of their Hindu clients. They claimed and mostly secured social respect through associating with a sacred book and acquiring literacy. Though the wages were modest, wages in cash in many ways gave them bargaining power within their families. Biblewomen did not hesitate to ally with an alien religion and foreign groups even when antiforeign sentiments were at a peak, if it helped to accomplish their twin agenda of changing the religious and social landscape of the Telugu society.

As in the case of American women missionaries, the mission theology of Telugu Biblewomen was *holistic*. A careful comparison of the job description of Biblewomen with those of other mission employees illustrates the breadth of their mission theology. As in many other contexts, the ministers of the word and sacrament, who were male, dominated the ecclesiastical structures of the Telugu Protestants. Catechists in the Lutheran communities taught the basic tenants of the faith. In the Baptist tradition, evangelists introduced Christianity to non-Christians and invited them to have faith in Christ. Male colporteurs peddled copies of the Bible and scriptural portions. Like male colporteurs and evangelists, Biblewomen served those outside the Christian community. Like ministers and catechists, Biblewomen provided pastoral care, visited the sick, encouraged the despondent, and taught the basics of Christian faith within the community. While the services of schoolteachers were confined to mission schools and those of nurses to hospital settings, Biblewomen worked in both environments. The mission activism of Biblewomen extended to various contexts—sanctuaries, streets, houses, schools, and hospitals. Their mission included the preaching of Scripture, teaching of Christian faith, demonstrating the Christian practice, teaching literacy, caring for the sick, inviting others to faith in Christ, and seeking social change.

## APPENDIX

### LETTERS OF MARIAN BOWERS AS QUOTED BY ELLEN RANYARD

SIR,—Aware that frequent opportunities occur for verbal communication, you will, doubtless, be surprised at my addressing this to you; but, fearful of trespassing on your time on such occasions, I have preferred the present mode. It is necessary to relate the circumstances by which I first became acquainted with your efforts to make known the Gospel of Christ; but you may remember the request I made the first time I ever addressed you. I asked you to lend me a Bible—you knew not my name or residence; yet, with cheerful kindness, you complied with that request; and, for the first time in my life, I brought a Bible into my home. It was on the 11th of February, 1853. That Bible I still retain: of its influence over me none but its Great Author can be aware; nor of the slow but certain means by which its precious truths have been revealed to my benighted soul.

“With my bodily sufferings during the period you are, to a great extent, acquainted. Twice compelled to seek surgical aid in a hospital—to all appearances I was sinking to my grave; but my God looked mercifully on me, and bade me live.

“You know, however, nothing of the wounds that defied the surgeon’s skill—wounds that divine grace inflicted, which divine mercy could alone have healed. That I have been the recipient of such mercy I humbly dare to hope; and, God helping me, I have devoted every moment of my life to prove my gratitude. I feel that, to testify my thanks for the precious pardon of an offended God, there are other ways than words; and I have thought over many plans, all of which I have dismissed but one, which is for me perfectly practicable; and it is to ask your cooperation in it that I presume to address you.

“During that time I was in the hospital I had frequent opportunities of witnessing the utterly friendless conditions of many poor outcasts, who sought admission to its charity, the filthy plight of their

persons and clothing proving their need of a female hand to rectify disorder.

“I have not to learn, sir, that in your missionary visits to the abodes of vice, you meet with many such who have none to help them. Now, I wish to dedicate the time I have to spare (it might be two or three hours a day), not so much to the decent poor, who have a claim on the sympathy of their neighbors, but to the lost and degraded of my own sex, whom, from their vicious lives, no tenderly reared female would be likely to approach; but to me, who, by God’s mercy, was preserved in my youth from a like fate, such scenes will have no terror: and I shall esteem it another benefit received from you if you will at any time let me know where such a sufferer lives. No matter how degraded she may be. It will be enough for her to require my aid—such as cleansing and washing her, and repairing her garments. If she can, by your mean, obtain admission to a hospital. I will, by frequent visits, take care that she has a change of linen, and in all ways endeavor to win such erring sister back to virtue and to peace.

“But while especially devoting my services to those who have none to help them, I shall ever consider it as much my duty to render aid to any desolate sick, who may at any time come under your notice.

“Accept, sir, my grateful recollections of your sympathy, to which I am so largely indebted for my restored health, and allow me to subscribe myself your obedient, humble servant,  
MARIAN B.”

\* \* \*

“SIR,—After anxious and prayerful consideration of the path pointed out, I feel that I shall have much need of strength to overcome the obstacles that will meet me on every side; but I believe with humble confidence that the grace which was able to subdue my own heart will never leave me in my effort to pour into the hearts of others that blessed message. I am myself too strong a proof of the power of the Almighty God to dare to doubt in any case the mercy which broke down the strongholds of sin in me.

“And if I foresee trials in that path, what sources of joy and comfort do I not foresee likewise! An opening is made to me, which I never even dared to hope for, and I may be sent as the glad messenger of light to some poor sufferers who are anxiously wishing for a knowledge of the blessed Book, and, being unable to read it, have none to read it to them.

“What a sweet employ it will be for me in the evening, after having faithfully devoted the time required by the Bible Society for the sale of the books committed to me, if I can return to any poor home where I have seen the aid of a friendly hand to be needed. The performance of some kind office may be the means of my obtaining permission to read, as well as I can, explain the glorious truths of the Book, for which in the morning, perhaps, I had vainly endeavored to obtain an entrance.

“Indeed, sir, I feel I cannot write what I foresee, or tell you how my heart warms as I write it. It appears that God is graciously marking out a path for me in which alone I am fit to labor. I know nothing of the customs and manners of the rich; I could not undertake the most menial service in a gentleman’s house; but I can talk to the poor outcasts among whom I dwell; my deepest sympathy is secured to them by the sad history of my own early days. I may help the poor untried wife and mother. I may send young children to school. I may have a word in season for the drunken and even the infidel husband. It will be a privilege for me to obtain admission to those miserable homes, and on what errand!—with the Word of God! To its Author I look to direct me to turn all my opportunities to His glory! I cast myself upon His almighty power to aid me, and I will fear no evil. Accept my thanks for this fresh proof of your kindness, and I beg to be remembered in your prayers.

“Your deeply obliged servant,  
“Marian.”

# NOTES

## 1 INTRODUCTION

1. A cluster of indigenous ethnic groups outside the four-tiered Hindu society ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy. See pp. 32–33 for further discussion on the use of the term.
2. See p. 52 for further clarity.
3. M. N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 32.
4. An ancient Hindu legal text *Manu dharmasutra* has been cited to support this social arrangement.
5. This word has been spelled differently in missionary records as Bible woman, Bible-woman, and Biblewoman. For the sake of consistency, I have used the last one.
6. Telugu is a linguistic group in southeastern India.
7. This mutiny has also been identified as the “Great Revolt,” the “First War of Independence,” and the “Revolt of 1857.”
8. The British established their cantonments in Vizianagaram, Samar-lakota, Machilipatnam, and Phirangipuram.
9. Eustace Bromley, *They Were Men Sent from God: A Centenary Record of Gospel Work in India among the Telugus in the Godavari Delta and Neighboring Parts, 1836–1936* (Bangalore, India: The Scripture Literature Press, 1937), 5.
10. The new rulers distributed the territory among the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra.
11. Robert E. Frykenberg, *Guntur District, 1788–1848: A History of Local Influences and Central Authority in South India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). Analyzing the transactions between local rulers and British colonists in other regions of the subcontinent, Nicholas Dirks highlights the venal collaboration between the local bourgeois and the East India Company representatives. See Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 37–85.
12. The greater freedom for missionary activities did not necessarily mean complete license, which some evangelical Parliamentarians in Britain lobbied for.
13. Atlury Murali, “Cultural History of Pre-colonial Deccan: A Study into the Long-Term Dynamics of Change,” in *Different Types of History* ed. Bharati Ray (Delhi, India: Pearson Longman, 2009), 245.

14. Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (Calcutta, India: STREE, 2003).
15. *Ibid.*, 27.
16. Mary E. Chamberlain, *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields—China, Japan, India, Arabia: A History of Five Decades of the Women's Board of Foreign Missions, Reformed Church in America* (New York: Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1925), 57. See also *India's Women: The Magazine of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society* 7:40 (July–August 1887): 184.
17. Eugene F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
18. This is an art that some Dalit groups specialized in.
19. Women and children in North America constituted the support base for these activities.
20. Muriel Spurgeon Carder, *Jewel of India* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, n.d.).
21. John E. Clough, *Social Christianity in the Orient: The Story of a Man, a Mission and a Movement* (New York: MacMillan, 1914), 84.
22. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).
23. *Ibid.*, 29.
24. *Ibid.*, 41.
25. The Constitution of India empowers the government to make special provisions for the advancement of the socially and educationally backward groups including the Dalits and other indigenous communities (Article 15:4). A Presidential Order issued in 1950 had excluded Dalit Christians from the list of possible beneficiaries and this disability continues to the present day.
26. R. Pierce Beaver, *All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1968).
27. R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Missions: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980).
28. Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Theory and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984).
29. Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).
30. Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870–1920* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985).
31. Ruth C. Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876–1914* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1990).

32. Hill, *The World Their Household*, 5.
33. Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility*, 31.
34. *Ibid.*, 51.
35. *Ibid.*, 26.
36. Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 409.
37. *Ibid.*, 417.
38. Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.
39. Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 65.
40. Chad Bauman, “Redeeming Indian ‘Christian’ Womanhood: Missionaries, Dalits, and Agency in Colonial India,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24:2 (2008): 5–27.
41. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 12. Said argues that the scholarly interest of the Europeans in the colonized countries was part of the larger colonizing project of the Europeans. European and North American scholars studied the cultures of Asia and Africa in order to control, maintain, and colonize them. The very act of writing about or representing the other is a power claim and involves power. No knowledge is manufactured apart from the political processes within which it operated.
42. Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).
43. *Ibid.*, 11.
44. *Ibid.*, 167.
45. Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 213–214.
46. *Ibid.*, 118.
47. Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 4.
48. Antoinette Burton, “The White Woman’s Burden: British Feminists and the ‘Indian Woman,’ 1865–1915,” in Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, 137–138.
49. Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, 148.
50. *Ibid.*, 139.
51. *Ibid.*, 152.
52. Susan Thorne, “Missionary-Imperial Feminism,” in *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, ed. Mary T. Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehoaus (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 48.
53. *Ibid.*, 54.
54. *Ibid.*, 48.
55. Maina Chawla Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathen Lands”: American Missionary Women in South Asia, 1860s–1940s* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 47.

56. Singh, *Gender, Religion, and “Heathen Lands,”* 221.
57. Ibid., 226.
58. Leslie A. Fleming, “A New Humanity: American Missionaries’ Ideals for Women in North India, 1870–1930,” in Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, 192.
59. Eliza Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
60. Ibid., 9.
61. Ibid., 7.
62. Ibid., 10. See Huber and Lutkehoaus, *Gendered Missions*, 54.
63. Singh, *Gender, Religion and “Heathen Lands,”* 206; cf. Chaudhuri and Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism*, 133.
64. Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Rule* (Oxford: Routledge, 1995); cf. Inderpal Grewel, *Home and Harem: Nations, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
65. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 48.
66. John Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi, India: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994). See also John Webster, *A Social History of Christianity: Northwest India since 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
67. Dick Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India: The London Missionary Society in South Travancore in the 19th Century* (Delhi, India: Manohar, 1989).
68. Geoffrey Oddie, *Social Protest in India: British Protestant Missionaries and Social Reforms, 1850–1900* (New Delhi, India: Manohar, 1979). See also Geoffrey Oddie, *Religious Conversion Movements in South Asia: Continuities and Change, 1800–1990* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1997).
69. J. W. Gladstone, *Protestant Christianity and People’s Movements in Kerala: A Study of Christian Mass Movements in Relation to Neo-Hindu Socio-Religious Movements in Kerala, 1850–1936* (Trivandrum, India: Seminary Publications, 1984).
70. J. W. Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), 162.
71. Webster, *Dalit Christians*, 70.
72. Anupama Rao, ed., *Gender and Caste* (Delhi, India: Kali for Women, 2003), 2.
73. Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste*.
74. Ibid., 27.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid., 73.
77. Ibid., 87.
78. Rao, *Gender and Caste*, 4.
79. Ruth Tucker, “The Role of Bible Women in the World Evangelism,” *Missionology* 13:2 (April 1985): 133–146.

80. Jane Haggis, “‘Good Wives and Mothers’ or ‘Dedicated Workers?’ Contradictions of Domesticity in the ‘Mission of Sisterhood,’ Travancore, South India,” in *Maternities and Modernities: Colonialism and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 81.
81. Eliza Kent, “Tamil Bible Women and the Zenana Missions of Colonial South India,” *History of Religions* 39:2 (November 1999), 149.
82. Deborah Gaitskell, “Hot Meetings and Hard Kraals,” *Missionalia* 13:1 (April 2003): 87–88.
83. Mrinalini Sebastian, “Reading Archives from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective: ‘Native’ Bible Women and the Missionary Ideal,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 19:1 (Spring 2003): 5–25.
84. “Transnational Biblewomen: Asian and African Women in Christian Mission,” ed. Deborah Gaitskell and Wendy Urban-Mead. Special issue, *Women’s History Review* 17:4 (September 2008).
85. Rhonda Semple, “Ruth, Miss Mackintosh, and Ada and Rose Morris,” in “Transnational Biblewomen” ed. Gaitskell and Urban-Mead, 561–574.
86. Ibid., 561.
87. Wendy Urban-Mead, “Sitshokupi Sibanda: ‘Biblewoman’ or evangelist? Ways of Naming and Remembering Female Leadership in a Mission Church in Colonial Zimbabwe,” in “Transnational Biblewomen” ed. Gaitskell and Urban-Mead, 653–670.
88. Vanessa Wood, “The Part Played by Chinese Women in the formation of an Indigenous Church in China: Insights from the archive of Myfanny Wood, LMS Missionary,” in “Transnational Biblewomen” ed. Gaitskell and Urban-Mead, 597–610.
89. Valerie Griffiths, “Biblewomen from London to China: The Transnational Appropriation of a Female Mission Idea,” in Transnational Biblewomen,” ed. Gaitskell and Urban-Mead, 521–542.
90. Ellen Xiang-Yu Cai, “The First Group of Bible-Women in Swatow in 1870s: Their Changes after Receiving Adele M. Fielde’s Training,” TMs, shared through an e-mail.
91. Ling Oi Ki, “Bible Women,” in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity and Social Mobility*, ed. Jessie Gregory Lutz (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 259.
92. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 199.
93. Jayawardena, *The White Woman’s Other Burden*, 62.
94. G. Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 1997).
95. John C. B. Webster offers a persuasive argument on why Dalit groups across the subcontinent can be studied together as a single community. See Webster, *Historiography of Christianity in India* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2012), 189.

## 2 FOREMOTHERS AND FOREIGN SISTERS

1. S. Joe Sebastian, *The Jesuit Carnatic Mission: A Foundation of Andhra Church* (Secunderabad, India: Jesuit Province Society, 2004), 44. See also Solomon Thanugundla, *Structures of the Church in Andhra Pradesh: An Historico-Judicial Study* (Secunderabad, India: Karunasri Printers, 1977), 19.
2. Antonius Kroot, *History of the Telugu Christians* (Trichinapalli, India: Mill Hill St. Joseph's Society, 1910), 1. Kroot, a Mill Hill missionary, did not identify himself as the author but many Catholic historians identify Kroot as the author of this volume. The Mill Hill or St. Joseph's Missionary Society, which Kroot represented, was founded in 1866; cf. Sebastian, *Jesuit Carnatic Mission*, 44.
3. Pierrie Du Jarric et al., *Akbar and the Jesuits: An Account of the Jesuit Missions to the Court of Akbar* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926); See also Arnulf Camps, *Studies in Asian Mission History: 1956–1998* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 33–103.
4. Sebastian, *The Jesuit Carnatic Mission*, 44. See also Satyanarayana Sharma Terala, *Vijayanagara Charitram: 1336–1680* [History of Vizianagar, 1336–1680] (Nallagonda: Sankranthi, 2003), 147.
5. Thanugundla, *Structures of the Church*, 22.
6. Ibid.
7. A Vaishnava subcaste.
8. Kroot, *History of the Telugu Christians*, 9. Dasaries were worshippers of Lord Vishnu.
9. Sebastian, *Jesuit Carnatic Mission*, 45; cf. See also Thanugundla, *Structures of the Church*, 29.
10. For more discussion on this Roman Catholic paradigm of mission, see Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Theory and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 366.
11. Kroot, *History of the Telugu Christians*, 21.
12. Ibid.
13. E. R. Hambye, *History of Christianity in India: Vol. 3, Andhra Pradesh* (Bangalore, India: Church History of Association of India, 1991), 313. Hambye doubts if this family was of Telugu origin, as Punganur in the eighteenth century was inhabited by both Telugu and Tamil linguistic groups. I suspect the family to be of Telugu background, as the Velama caste belongs to the Telugu social order.
14. Kroot, *History of the Telugu Christians*, 21.
15. This religious ideology is also known as *veerasaivism* or the cult of *linga*. It dates back to the teaching of Basaveswara of the twelfth century.
16. Sebastian, *The Jesuit Carnatic Mission*, 71. See also Thanugundla, *Structures of the Church*, 61.
17. Kroot, *History of the Telugu Christians*, 297.
18. Ibid., 296–297.

19. *Memorial of the Rt. Rev. Daniel Murphy, Bishop of Philadelphia, Coadjutor Vicar Apostolic of Madras, and Pro-Vicar of Hyderabad* (London: T. Booker, 1852).
20. Carlo Torriani, *History of PIME in Andhra* (Eluru, India: PIME Publications, 2005), 18.
21. Sebastian, *The Jesuit Carnatic Mission*, 147. See also Kroot, *History of the Telugu Christians*, 291. Louis XV earlier banned the Society of Jesus in France in 1764 while the Portuguese administration in Goa had prohibited the Jesuit activities in their territories ten years earlier.
22. J. S. M. Hooper and W. J. Culshaw, *Bible Translation in India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (Bombay, India: Oxford University Press, 1963), 87.
23. Wilber T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism: A Study of the Local and Village Deities of Southern India* (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1925), 29–31; P. Y. Luke and John B. Carman, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 57; Frank C. Sackett, *Vision and Venture: A Record of Fifty Years in Hyderabad, 1879–1929* (London: The Cargate Press, n.d.), 117.
24. Elmore listed seven goddesses or seven sisters whom Dalits and Sudhras alike worshipped in the Nellore district. They are Poleramma, Ankamma, Muthyalamma, Dilli Polasi, Bangaramma, Mathamma, and Renuka. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, 19–28.
25. Ibid., 70.
26. Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 4 (Madras, India: Government Press, 1909), 306. Ellamma is often identified as the wife of Siva.
27. The male priest who presided at the blood sacrifices was called a *pothuraju* as well. And the buffalo sacrificed was identified as *devara pothu*, the big or divine animal.
28. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, 25.
29. Thurston, *Caste and Tribes of Southern India*, 321.
30. Henry Whitehead, *Village Gods of South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1916), 50–54.
31. Carman, *Village Christians*, 57; Whitehead, *Village Gods*, 48.
32. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, 70; Whitehead, *Village Gods*, 63.
33. While men priests inherit their office, a Madiga woman becomes a Matangi when chosen by the deity through possession and endorsed by the village community after a series of tests. Woman priestess in the cult of Nukalamma inherits the office from her mother. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 295.
34. Joyce B. Flueckiger, “Wandering from ‘Hills to alleys’ with the Goddess: Protection and Freedom in the *Matamma* Tradition of Andhra,” in *Women’s Lives, Women’s Rituals in the Hindu Tradition*, ed. Tracy Pintchman’s (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35–54.

35. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, 295–305.
36. Carman, *Village Christians*, 57.
37. For details about the cult of Basheer Beebi, See K. V. S. R. Narasamamba, “The Dargahs of Women Saints in East Godavari District,” *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 11:3–4 (July–December 1992): 81–86. For a missionary representation of the Veeramma cult, see Mary McLaurin, *Healing Hands: Miss Jessie Allyn, M.D., of Pithapuram* (n.p.: The Centenary Committee of the Canadian Church, 1945), 10–11; A. A. Scott, *Beacon Lights: A Sketch of the Origin and the Development of Our Mission Stations in India and the Missionary Personnel* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1922), 93.
38. For a detailed analysis of his work, see Peter Vethanayagamony, *It Began in Madras: The Eighteenth-Century Lutheran-Anglican Ecumenical Ventures in Mission and Benjamin Schultze* (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 2010).
39. Eustace B. Bromley, *They Were Men Sent from God: A Centenary Record of Gospel Work in India among the Telugus in the Godavari Delta and Neighboring Parts, 1836–1936* (Bangalore, India: The Scripture Literature Press, 1937), 33.
40. Robert Bernard Dann, *Father of Faith Missions: The Life and Times of Anthony Norris Groves* (London: Authentic Media, 2004), 238.
41. Lady Hope and William Digby, *General Sir Arthur Cotton, R.E., K.C.S.I.: His Life and Work* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1900), 203.
42. Geoffrey A. Oddie, “Christian Conversion in the Telugu Country, 1860–1900: A Case Study of One Protestant Movement in the Godavary-Krishna Delta,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 12 (Jan–March 1975), 67.
43. John Webster, *The Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi, India: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 70.
44. W. T. Stunt, *Turning the World Upside Down: A Century of Missionary Endeavour* (Bath, UK: Echoes of Service, 1972), 91. Writing more than a century later, Stunt identified the congregation members as those of “high castes.” It is probable that Atchamma found a place to live in a Sudhra neighborhood given her access to power centers. But it is highly unlikely that a Madiga woman and the one with previous conjugal relationship with a European official would have continued to reside in a non-Dalit neighborhood. Stunt, who earlier listed two, one high-caste man and another outcaste woman as the first converts, might have described the congregation as that of “high caste” in his enthusiasm to find only caste converts in the region.
45. Bromley, *They were Men Sent*, 66.
46. Ibid.
47. Stunt, *Turning the World*, 91.
48. Frederick Tatford, *The Challenge of India: That the World May Believe*, vol. 5 (Bath, UK: Echoes of Service, 1984), 96.

49. Scott, *Beacon Lights*, 159.
50. J. Mangamma, *Andhra Desamulo Kraistava Missionarila Seva* [Ministries of Christian Missionaries in Andhra Country] (Hyderabad, India: Telugu Academy, 1992), 19.
51. Eliza Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 31–38.
52. *Ibid.*, 34.
53. Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, *While Sewing Sandals: Tales of a Telugu Pariah Tribe*, revised ed. (New Delhi, India: Asian Educational Services, 2000), 114.
54. *Ibid.*, 123.
55. *Ibid.*, 117.
56. *Ibid.*, 5.
57. Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (Bombay, India: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 120–123; cf. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, 79–80.
58. Rauschenbusch-Clough, *While Sewing Sandals*, 117.
59. John E. Clough, *Social Christianity in the Orient: The Story of a Man, a Mission and a Movement*. New York: MacMillan, 1914, 107.
60. Mabel E. Archibald, *Glimpses and Gleams of India and Bolivia: The Jubilee Book of Mission Bands* (Toronto: The American Baptist Publication Society for Baptist Women's Missionary Societies of Canada, 1923), 34.
61. LNR [Ellen Henrietta Ranyard], *The Missing Link, or Bible-Women in the Homes of the London Poor* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 13.
62. The patterns and social ramifications of the migrations are analyzed by Michael Anderson, “Social Implications of Demographic Change,” in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950: People & Their Environment*, ed. Francis M. L. Thompson, vol. 2 (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1992), 10–11; Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism & the Realism Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 20. The writings of Hugh McLeod would be of great help to those interested in understanding religion in nineteenth-century Britain.
63. Frances Knight, *The Church in the Nineteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 6.
64. Ranyard, *The Missing Link*, 178.
65. Lillian L. Shiman, *Women and Leadership in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 35.
66. Edward Cadbury, M. Cecil Matheson, and George Shann, eds., *Women's Work and Wages: A Phase of Life in an Industrial City* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), 40.
67. Roger Steer, *Good News for the World, 200 Years of Making the Bible Heard: The Story of Bible Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2004), 147.

68. Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, 77.
69. Cadbury, Matheson, and Shann, *Women's Work and Wages*, 119.
70. *Ibid.*, 191.
71. Joseph Stubenrauch, "Silent Preachers in the Age of Ingenuity: Faith, Commerce, and Religious Tracts in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain," *Church History* 80:3 (September 2011): 557. Stubenrauch cites this incident from the *Tract Magazine* published by the Religious Tract Society in 1834.
72. This paragraph is a summary of David Bebbington's definition of evangelicalism. David Bebbington, *Evangelicals in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1989), 4.
73. A. M. Chirgwin, *The Bible in World Evangelism* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 45.
74. Charles E. Edwards, *The Romance of the Book* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1932), 61.
75. Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, 44.
76. Steer, *Good News for the World*, 80–81. See also Steer's chapter in *Sowing the Word: The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1804–2004*, ed. Stephen Batalden, Kathleen Cann, and John Dean (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), 63–80.
77. Hooper and Culshaw, *Bible Translation*, 87.
78. *Ibid.*, 89.
79. *Ibid.*, 90.
80. *Ibid.*, 87.
81. Chirgwin, *The Bible in World Evangelism*, 47.
82. *The Annual Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society* 3 (1807): 37.
83. Given the vastness of the subject and the wealth of available literature about it, I highlighted some of its aspects that I found to be useful for the present purposes. If interested in the subject, the following books will be of help: Shiman, *Women and Leadership*; Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France, and the United States, 1780–1860* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984); Dale A. Johnson, *Women in English Religion: 1700–1925* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983); Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792–1850: The "Heathen" at Home and Overseas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
84. Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, 45.
85. *Ibid.*, 59.
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Ibid.*, 94.
88. Johnson, *Women in English Religion*, 189.
89. Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, 94.
90. Florence Nightingale, *The Institution of Kaiserswerth on the Rhine for the Practical Training of Deaconesses* (London: London Ragged Colonial Training School, 1851), 8.
91. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

92. Ibid., 10.
93. Ruth W. Rasche, “The Deaconess Sisters: Pioneer Professional Women,” *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, ed. Barbara B. Zikmund (New York: United Church Press, 1984), 99–102.
94. Johnson, *Women in English Religion*, 176.
95. Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, 96.
96. Johnson, *Women in English Religion*, 180.
97. Cecilia Robinson, *The Ministry of Deaconesses* (London: Methuen, 1898), 110.
98. Harriette Cooke, *Mildmay; or, the Story of the First Deaconess Institution* (London: Elliot Stock, 1898), 10.
99. Brian Heeney, *The Women’s Movement in the Church of England: 1850–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 63.
100. Ibid., 24, 46.
101. Ibid., 52.
102. Ibid., 55.
103. S. A. J., “In What Way Can Wives and Mothers Best Promote the Revival of Piety in the Church?” *The British Mothers’ Magazine* 4 (December, 1848): 265–268, quoted in Johnson, *Women in English Religion*, 124.
104. Johnson, *Women in English Religion*, 127.
105. Sarah Austin, *Two Letters on Girls’ School and on the Training of Working Women* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1857).
106. John Angell James, “Female Piety; or, The Young Woman’s Friend and Guide Through Life to Immortality,” in *The Works of John Angell James: One white minister of the Church Assembling in Carrs Lane Birmingham*, ed. T. S. James (London: Hamilton Adams, 1860), 78.
107. Ibid.
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, 91. Some evangelical women even opposed the enfranchisement of women. See also Twells, *Civilising Mission*, 85.
111. Shiman, *Women and Leadership*, 47.
112. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 21–32.
113. Ibid., 30. Bowers’ husband died in 1859, two years after she became a Biblewoman.
114. Ibid., 19.
115. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 19.
116. Ibid.
117. Ibid., 20.
118. Ibid., 24–25. Used thrice in two pages.
119. Ibid., 26.
120. Ibid.
121. Edwin W. Smith, *Tales of God’s Packmen* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1928), 17.

122. Frank K. Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse: Philanthropy in Modern Britain* (London: Faber, 1988), 48.
123. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 173.
124. *Bible Work at Home and Abroad: A Record of the Work of Biblewomen and Nurses* 1:12 (December 1884): 335.
125. Lizzie Aldridge, *The World's Workers: Florence Nightingale, Frances Ridley Havergal, Catherine Marsh, Mrs. Ranyard* (L.N.R.), 5th ed. (London: Cassell, 1890), 101.
126. Aldridge, *World's Workers*, 101.
127. *Ibid.*, 104.
128. Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 104.
129. *Ibid.*, 101.
130. Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 59–60.
131. LNR [Ellen Henrietta Ranyard], *The Book and Its Story; A Narrative for the Young: On the Occasion of the Jubilee of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1855).
132. Leslie Howsam does not think that the BFBS claimed ownership of the book. According to her, the commitment of the BFBS not to add a note to their products may have been the reason for this indifference. But I do not see any hint of betrayal from the BFBS. Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, 172.
133. *The Annual Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society* 59 (1863): 300.
134. For a discussion on this phenomenon of revivals in the later years of the 1850s, see Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott Ltd., 1949); Janice Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland, 1859–1905* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000).
135. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 298.
136. *Bible Work at Home and Abroad: A Record of the Work of Biblewomen and Nurses* 1:12 (December 1884): 335.
137. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 26.
138. Frank K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 126.
139. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 55.
140. *Ibid.*, 67.
141. Stubenrauch, “Silent Preachers in the Age of Ingenuity,” 566.
142. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 67.
143. *Ibid.*, 201–202.
144. *Ibid.*, 30.
145. Mrs. Collier, *A Bible-Woman's Story*, ed. Eliza Nightingale (London: Sallantyne Press, 1885), 94.
146. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 26.

147. L. N. R. [Ellen Henrietta Ranyard], *Nurses for the Needy or Bible-Women Nurses in the Homes of the London Poor* (London: James Nisbet, 1875), 34.
148. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 38.
149. *Ibid.*, 46.
150. Elspeth Platt, *The Story of the Ranyard Mission: 1857–1937* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937), 61.
151. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 272.
152. *Ibid.*, 283.
153. *Ibid.*
154. Ranyard, *Nurses for the Needy*, 6.
155. Platt, *The Story of the Ranyard Mission*, 43.
156. Ranyard, *Book and Its Story*, 357; cf. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 30.
157. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 297.
158. *Ibid.*, 300.
159. *The Annual Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society* 56 (1860): 278.
160. Howsam, *Cheap Bibles*, 39.
161. Peter Wosh, *Spreading the Word: The Bible Business in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).
162. Stubenrauch, “Silent Preachers in the Age of Ingenuity,” 551.
163. Thomas Timpson, *Bible Triumphs: A Jubilee Memorial for the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853), 452.
164. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 25.
165. *Ibid.*, 297.
166. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 99–102.
167. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 280.
168. *Ibid.*, 16.
169. *Ibid.*, 80.
170. *Ibid.*, 235.
171. Fidelia Fiske, *Recollections of Mary Lyon, with Selections from Her Instructions to the Pupils in Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary* (Boston, MA: American Tract Society, 1866), 236–239; Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 65.
172. Twells, *Civilising Mission*, 44.
173. *Bible Work at Home and Abroad: A Record of the Work of Biblewomen and Nurses* 1:2 (February 1884): 36.
174. Ranyard, *Nurses for the Needy*, vii.
175. *Ibid.*, 57.
176. *Ibid.*, 301; cf. Platt, *Story of the Ranyard Mission*, 61.
177. Ranyard, *Nurses for the Needy*, vii.
178. *Ibid.*, 31.
179. *Ibid.*
180. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 291.
181. Brian Dickey, “Going About and Doing Good: Evangelicals and Poverty c. 1815–1879,” in *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals*

*and Society in Britain, 1780–1980*, ed. John Wolffe (London: SPCK, 1995), 50.

182. Platt, *Story of the Ranyard Mission*, 24.
183. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, 129.
184. Ranyard, *Nurses for the Needy*, 48.
185. Ranyard, *Missing Link*, 287.
186. *Bible Work at Home and Abroad: A Record of the Work of Biblewomen and Nurses* 1:1 (January 1884): 335.
187. Twells, *Civilising Mission*, 2.
188. Ruth Rouse, “Voluntary Movements and the Changing Ecumenical Climate,” in *History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517–1948*, ed. Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 309–311.
189. Heeney, *Women’s Movement*, 49.
190. William Page Wood, *Parochial Mission Women: A Paper Read at the Church Congress, Manchester, October 15th, 1863* (London: E. Faithful Press, 1864), 4.
191. Wood, *Parochial Mission Women*, 4.
192. Ibid., 13.
193. *Bible Work at Home and Abroad: A Record of the Work of Biblewomen and Nurses* 1:9 (September 1884): 159–160.
194. Ibid., 159.
195. Ibid.
196. Collier, *A Bible-Woman’s Story*, 45–46.

### 3 THE MEETING OF TWO WORLDS IN ONE OFFICE: 1880–1921

1. The Telugu phrase, “*Raja Yogi*” literally means “royal priest.” This title has been assigned to preachers in the messianic movement founded by Pothuluri Veerabrahmam. Veerabrahmam, a Sudhra saint, preached impending millennial rule marked by social justice and peace. His life and message resembled that of Jesus. Veerabrahmam was believed to have brought forth life out of the dead and to have promised his coming reign. He believed that God is spirit and is one. See Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religions* (Bombay, India: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 123.
2. John Craig, *Forty Years among the Telugus: A History of the Mission of the Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, Canada, to the Telugus, South India, 1867–1907* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1908), 19. See also Eustace B. Bromley, *They were Men Sent: A Centenary Record of Gospel Work in India among the Telugus in the Godavari Delta and Neighboring Parts, 1836–1936* (Bangalore, India: The Scripture Literature Press, 1937), 162.

3. John E. Clough, *Social Christianity in the Orient: The Story of a Man, a Mission and a Movement* (New York: MacMillan, 1914), 93.
4. Ibid., 98.
5. The title of the letter from John Clough cited in *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 50:12 (December 1870): 434.
6. John Webster, *Dalit Christians: A History* (Delhi, India: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 70.
7. Emma Rauschenbusch-Clough, *While Sewing Sandals: Tales of a Telugu Pariah Tribe*. Rev. ed. (New Delhi, India: Asian Educational Services, 2000), 293.
8. W. Chichele Plowden, *Report on the Census of British India taken on the 17th February 1881* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1883), 35.
9. Ibid.
10. Clough, *Social Christianity*, 293.
11. Bromley, *They were Men Sent*, 162.
12. Webster, *Dalit Christians*, 43.
13. For a graphic reconstruction of the event drawn from historical documents and oral traditions, read G. Kalyana Rao, *Antarani Vasantham* (Hyderabad, India: Visalandhra, 2001).
14. See the following books for more details: Ravela Joseph, *Bhakti Theology of Purushottam Choudari* (Chennai: CLS, 2004); Rajaiah D. Paul, *Chosen Vessels: Lives of Ten Indian Christian Pastors of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1961).
15. Rauschenbusch-Clough, *While Sewing Sandals*, 112; cf. Clough, *Social Christianity*, 97.
16. David Downie, *The Lone Star: A History of the Telugu Mission of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1924), 48–55.
17. Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 14.
18. Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870–1920* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1985), 36–40; cf. Ruth C. Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876–1914* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1990), 18.
19. Ibid., 13.
20. The Women's Foreign Missionary Society by Methodists in Canada was not founded until 1881 while its counterpart in the United States was established as early as 1869. For an analysis on why the missionary enterprise of Canadian women was delayed, see Rosemary R. Gagan, *Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881–1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); cf. Lorraine Coops, "Living by Faith: Maritime

Baptist Single Women Missionaries" (PhD diss., Queen's University, Kingston, 1996), 46.

21. *First Annual Report of the Woman's Baptist Missionary Society of the West* (Chicago: Women's Baptist Missionary of the West, 1872), 12. See also Sarah D. Stow's *History of Mount Holyoke Seminary, South Hadley, Mass: During Its First Half Century, 1837–1887* (South Hadley, MA: Mount Holyoke Seminary, 1887), 321.
22. Robert G. Torbet, *Venture of Faith: The Story of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society and the Women's American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, 1814–1954* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1955), 193.
23. Anna S. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital, Guntur, India* (Philadelphia, PA: Women's Missionary Society of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1928), 2.
24. Anna C. H. Martell, *Historical Sketch of the United Baptist Women's Mission Union of the Maritime Provinces* (n.p: n.d.), 15.
25. Maria Erling and Mark Granquist, *The Augustana Story: Shaping Lutheran Identity in North America* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 116.
26. Swan Swanson, *Foundations for Tomorrow: A Century of Progress in Augustana Lutheran World Missions* (Minneapolis, MN: Board of World Missions of Augustana Lutheran Church, 1960), 42.
27. Flora Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India* (Moncton, NB: Maritime Press, 1939), 273.
28. *Ibid.*, 263.
29. There are numerous reports of women hindering their men from conversion to Christianity. John Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies: The Jubilee Story of Some of the Principal Telugu Converts in the Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission in India from 1874 to 1924* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1925), 47, 74, 108; Mabel E. Archibald, *Glimpses and Gleams of India and Bolivia: The Jubilee Book of Mission Bands*. (Toronto: The American Baptist Publication Society for Baptist Women's Missionary Societies of Canada, 1923), 108; Margaret E. M. Sangster, ed., *A Manual for the Missions of The Reformed (Dutch) Church in America* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1877), 11; Jacob Chamberlain, *The Cobra's Den: And Other Stories of Missionary Work among the Telugus of India* (Chicago: Student Missionary Campaign Library, 1900), 208–210; J. Gregory Mantle, *Bible-Women in Eastern Lands* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1904), 4.
30. Irene H. Barnes, *Behind the Pardah: The Story of CEZMS Work in India* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1898), 82.
31. Matilda Churchill, *Letters from My Home in India*, ed. Grace McLeod Rogers (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1916), 91.
32. Christina Eriksson, "A Week's Tour by Boat-House," TMs, 4, Swenson Center, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL; *India's Women: The Magazine of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society* 8 (1888):

260; Katherine S. McLaurin, *Mary Bates McLaurin* (Toronto: Women's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society of Ontario West, 1945), 64.

33. George Drach and Calvin F. Kuder, *The Telugu Mission of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in North America* (Philadelphia, PA: General Council Publication House, 1914), 267.

34. J. K. H. Denny, *Toward the Sunrising: A History of Work for the Women of India Done by the Women from England, 1852–1901* (London: Marshall Brothers, [1902]), 240.

35. *India's Women: The Magazine of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society* 8 (1888): 260.

36. Ling Oi Ki, "Bible women," in *Pioneer Chinese Christian Women: Gender, Christianity and Social Mobility*, ed. Jessie Gregory Lutz (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2010), 251.

37. Drach and Kuder, *Telugu Mission*, 219.

38. *Baptist Year Book of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island* (Halifax: Christian Messenger Office, 1877). The publisher predicated the year of publication. This book might have been published after 1883.

39. John G. Leonard, *Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848–1919): A Biography of an Indian Social Reformer* (Hyderabad, India: Telugu University, 1991), 26.

40. Ibid.; cf. Yallampalli Vaikuntham, *Education and Social Change in South India: Andhra, 1880–1920* (Madras, India: New Era Publications, 1982), 123.

41. V. Ramakrishna, *Social Reform in Andhra: 1848–1919* (New Delhi, India: Vikas Publishing House, 1983), 93. Vaikuntham provides detailed statistics about the number of schools founded for boys and girls in the 1870s. See Vaikuntham, *Education and Social Change*, 15.

42. Brahmo Samaj is a nineteenth-century movement of reform-minded Hindus who believed in one God and campaigned for women's rights. Founded in 1828 by Raja Rammohan Roy, the society sought to reform Hinduism by welcoming ideological resources from other faiths.

43. Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, 93.

44. Vakulabharanam Rajagopal, "Fashioning Modernity in Telugu: Viresalingam and His Interventionist Strategy," *Studies in History* 21:1 (2005): 45–77.

45. Leonard, *Kandukuri Viresalingam*, 85.

46. Yogendra K. Malik, *South Asian Intellectuals and Social Change: A Study of the Role of Vernacular-Speaking Intelligentsia* (New Delhi, India: Heritage Publishers, 1982), 316.

47. Ramakrishna, *Social Reform*, 186.

48. Frances J. Baker, *The Story of the Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1869–1895* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1898), 12.

49. Charlotte C. Wyckoff, *A Hundred Years with Christ in Arcot: A Brief History of the Arcot Mission in India of the Reformed Church in America* (Madras, India: Ahura Press, 1953), 175.

50. *American Baptist Year-Book: 1870* (1870): 7.
51. *The Missing Link Magazine, or Bible Work at Home and Abroad* 15 (October 1, 1879): 312.
52. Mary E. Chamberlain, *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields, China, Japan, India, Arabia: A History of Five Decades of the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of Reformed Church in America* (New York: Woman's Board of Foreign Missions Reformed Church in America, 1925), 53.
53. Ibid. See also Sangster, *Manual for the Missions*, 102.
54. Sangster, *Manual for the Missions*, 65.
55. Ibid., 103.
56. I am borrowing this expression from Clifton Johnson. Johnson described the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary a “Minister’s Rib-factory” for the number of brides it trained for eligible ministers and missionaries. Johnson employed this image from the creation stories (Genesis 2:21–22) where the earliest woman was portrayed to have been made out of a rib of the first man to be his companion. Clifton Johnson, *Old-Time and School-Books* (New York: MacMillan, 1904), 146.
57. Edward T. Corwin, *The Manual of the Reformed Church in America (Formerly Ref. Prof. Dutch Church)*, 2nd ed. (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1902), 247.
58. *28th Annual Report of the Arcot Mission* (Madras, India: Graves, Cookson, 1879): 6.
59. *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 49:7 (1869): 258.
60. *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 57:4 (1877): 91.
61. Helen B. Montgomery, *Following the Sunrise: A Century of Baptist Mission, 1813–1913* (Boston, MA: American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, 1913), 105. See also Downie, *The Lone Star*, 40.
62. Downie, *The Lone Star*, 41.
63. Ibid., 50.
64. Finette Jewett, *Leaves from the Life of Lyman Jewett* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1898), 46.
65. Downie, *The Lone Star*, 40.
66. Ibid., 50.
67. She should not be confused with Periah’s wife whose name also was Nagamma. Clough, *Social Christianity*, 179.
68. Clough, *Social Christianity*, 179.
69. Downie, *The Lone Star*, 51.
70. Ibid., 53.
71. *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 52:5 (1872): 178.
72. Downie, *The Lone Star*, 53.
73. The Church of England Zenana Missionary Society working with the CMS appointed Kaveramma, Ratnamma, and Charlotte in or by 1880 in Krishna district. These women were not at work until 1878 according to the missionary records. See *The Indian Female Evangelist* 5:38 (January 1880): 190. Charlotte was identified as one of “low caste” descent. See *India’s Women: The Magazine of the Church of*

*England Zenana Missionary Society* 1:5 (September–October 1881): 238. Appointed in 1883, M. Harriet seems to be the earliest Lutheran Biblewoman. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital*, 40.

74. Daniel Orville, *Moving with the Times: The Story of Outreach from Canada into Asia, South America and Africa* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1973), 41; cf. A. A. Scott, *Beacon Lights: A Sketch of the Origin and the Development of Our Mission Stations in India and the Missionary Personnel* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1922), 159.

75. Scott, *Beacon Lights*, 159.

76. Ibid. See also Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India*, 85.

77. Scott, *Beacon Lights*, 159.

78. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 93.

79. Ibid.

80. A. V. Timpany, a Canadian Baptist who served with American Baptists in Ramayapatnam Seminary, might have introduced the Churchill to Sayamma and her family.

81. Churchill, *Letters from My Home*, 113–114; John Craig, “Historical Sketch of Canadian Baptist Missions,” in *The “Lone Star” Jubilee: Papers and Discussions of the Conference Held in Nellore, February 5–10, 1886 to Celebrate Fiftieth Anniversary of the American Baptist Telugu Mission* (Madras, India: Addison, 1886), 61.

82. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 93. See also Scott, *Beacon Lights*, 144.

83. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 94.

84. Ibid., 138.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., 140.

87. Craig, *Forty Years*, 245.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid., 253.

91. All Christians are called to be evangelists and one does not need to be paid in order to introduce Christianity to her neighbors.

92. *Report of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission for 1899, Ontario and Quebec Mission (organized 1874), Maritime Provinces’ Mission (organized 1875). Twenty-third Annual Conference Held in Kakinada, January 12–16, 1900* (Madras, India: Diocesan Press, 1900), 16.

93. Ibid., 15.

94. *Among the Telugus: Canadian Baptist Foreign Missions Annual Reports* (1899), 14–15.

95. *The Canadian Missionary Link* 3 (1880), 14; cf. Mary J. Frith, “Bible Women’s Work” in *The “Lone Star” Jubilee: Papers and Discussions of the Conference Held in Nellore, February 5–10, 1886 to Celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the American Baptist Telugu Mission* (Madras, India: Addison and Co., 1886), 54.

96. Mary S. McLaurin, *25 Years On* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1950), 31.

97. *India's Women: The Magazine of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society* 6:35 (September 1886): 252.
98. *Ibid.*
99. *Ibid.*, 264.
100. Paul, *Chosen Vessels*, 121. Ratnam was ordained in 1866.
101. Craig, *Forty Years*, 318.
102. Kuder, *Telugu Mission*, 145.
103. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 130.
104. *Ibid.*, 133.
105. *Ibid.*, 135.
106. Orville, *Moving with the Times*, 47. The ability to debate with Brahmin men was a celebrated gift. See also a report from Mrs. Isaac Cannaday, entitled “Meenakshi: The Bible Woman,” in *Lutheran Woman’s Work* 14:3 (March 1921): 83–84.
107. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 137.
108. Mary Julia Harpster, *Among the Telugoos: Illustrating Mission Work in India* (Philadelphia, PA: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902), 60.
109. Kuder, *Telugu Mission*, 319.
110. The Canadian Baptist missionaries founded a seminary in Samarlakota to train native men and women as evangelists and teachers. John Craig founded it in 1881. The word “jeevamrutha” literally means honey of immortality and life everlasting.
111. Churchill, *Letters from My Home*, 114.
112. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 138.
113. *Ibid.*, 21.
114. Frith, “Bible Women’s Work,” 227–231. Frith served in the region for seven years before moving to Assam where she worked with American Baptist missionaries. She was a Biblewoman in Ottawa and Montreal for two years before coming to India.
115. Frith, “Bible Women’s Work,” 228.
116. *Ibid.*, 229.
117. *Ibid.*
118. *Ibid.*, 230.
119. Arley Munson, *Jungle Days: Being the Experiences of an American Woman Doctor in India* (New York: Appleton, 1913), 203.
120. Scott, *Beacon Lights*, 154.
121. *Ibid.*, 159.
122. *Ibid.*, 55.
123. Craig, *Forty Years*, 204.
124. Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India*, 70.
125. Frith, “Bible Women’s Work,” 230.
126. Orville, *Moving with the Times*, 57.
127. Craig, *Forty Years*, 224.
128. *Ibid.*, 239.
129. Churchill, *Letters from My Home*, 246.

130. Malcolm L. Orchard and Katherine McLaurin, *The Enterprise: The Jubilee Story of the Canadian Baptist Mission in India, 1874–1924* (Toronto: The Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1925), 286.
131. *Report of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission* (1899), 14. See also Malcolm L. Orchard, *Canadian Baptists at Work* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1922), 83.
132. Orchard, *Canadian Baptists*, 54.
133. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital*, 43.
134. Scott, *Beacon Lights*, 159.
135. Downie, *The Lone Star*, 52.
136. Archibald, *Glimpses and Gleams*, 108–110. See also Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 74.
137. The conversion of Sarah, a Telugu Biblewoman, in Rangoon, Burma, is another classic illustration of this belief. Sarahamma, *Sarahamma: Telugu Biblewoman, Rangoon, Burma* (Boston, MA: Women's Baptist Foreign Missionary Society, n.d. [1910]), 2.
138. It is a tradition within Hinduism that stressed the faith in and devotion to a personal God (*swayam bhagawan* or *ishta daivam*). It is one of the four paths or disciplines with which an individual is believed to attain liberation or *moksa*. The word, *bhakti* literally means “sharing.” A *bhakt* is believed to be “sharing a relationship or bond with God.”
139. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital*, 73. This story is recorded in Matt 13: 3–23. For an interpretation of the same story in the district of Nellore, see Mantle, *Bible-Women in Eastern Lands*, 14.
140. Munson, *Jungle Days*, 43. This Bible story is recorded in Luke 2:1–24.
141. *Ibid.*
142. Archibald, *Glimpses and Gleams*, 110.
143. As mentioned earlier, Meera Bai of the sixteenth century from what now is known as Rajasthan contributed significantly to this trend.
144. Members of this Dalit subgroup traveled to different Dalit hamlets and sang the histories of the Dalit community. Considered lower than the Madigas, they often resided at the fringes of a Madiga hamlet for a period of time. They would invite Madigas to visit them during the night and sing the story of the community. The audience, in turn, remunerated these bard-historians in grains and food. The practice of singing history continues even today in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. Writing in 1909, Edgar Thurston, a colonial administrator, interpreted the recital of history by Dekkalis as songs in praise of Madigas. See Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 4 (Madras, India: Government Press, 1909), 324.
145. Joseph Dayam's dissertation, “Re-imagining an Indian Theology of the Cross Using Dalit Cultural Resources,” (ThD diss., Graduate Theological Union, 2009), analyzes the theological themes available in the songs of Dalit women.

146. Though not common, a Biblewoman is reported to have played a violin made out of a gourd while singing. Clarence H. Swavely, “*One Hundred Years in the Andhra Country: A History of the India Mission of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1842–1942*” (Madras, India: Diocesan Press, 1942), 256.
147. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital*, 70. See also William A. Stanton, *The Awakening of India: Forty Years among the Telugus* (Portland, OR: Falmouth Publishing, 1950), 172.
148. Craig, *Forty Years*, 214.
149. Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 253.
150. Margaret R. Seebach, *A Century in India: 1842–1942* (Philadelphia, PA: Women’s Missionary Society of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1942), 26.
151. Orchard, *Canadian Baptists*, 74.
152. Rayi Ratna Sundara Rao, *Bhakti Theology in the Telugu Hymnal* (Madras, India: CLS, 1983). See also Joseph, *Bhakti Theology*.
153. Gogu Syamala, *Nalla Proddhu: Dalita Streela Sahityam* [Black Dawn: Dalit Women’s Literature] (Hyderabad, India: Hyderabad Book Trust, 2003), 39–41, 48–50.
154. P. Y. Luke and John B. Carman, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 57.
155. Frank Colyer Sackett, *Out of the Miry Clay: The Story of the Hyderabad Mission to the Outcastes* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1924), 71.
156. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital*, 64.
157. Augusta Highland, *India* (Philadelphia, PA: Board of Foreign Missions of United Lutheran Church of America, n.d.), 24.
158. Munson, *Jungle Days*, 43; Denny, *Toward the Sunrising*, 241.
159. John S. Carman, *Rats, Plague, and Religion: Stories of Medical Mission Work in India* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1936), 181.
160. Sackett, *Out of the Miry Clay*, 58.
161. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital*, 44.
162. *Ibid.*, 42.
163. *Among the Telugus* (1924): 51.
164. Churchill, *Letters from My Home*, 283.
165. Craig, *Forty Years*, 262.
166. Orchard, *Canadian Baptists*, 79.
167. Craig, *Forty Years*, 262.
168. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 94.
169. Judges 5:7. This image has also employed to describe the role of women missionaries. See Chamberlain, *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields*, 55. This Biblical image has been used earlier by early nineteenth-century Methodists. For a short note on its usage, see Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind: 1770–1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95–107.
170. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 94.
171. *Ibid.*

172. Ibid., 40.
173. Downie, *The Lone Star*, 54; cf. Samuel F. Smith, *Rambles in Mission-fields* (Boston: W. G. Corthell, 1883), 119.
174. Luke 2:36.
175. Downie, *The Lone Star*, 53.
176. Churchill, *Letters from my Home*, 114; cf. Seebach, *Century in India*, 27.
177. Chamberlain, *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields*, 57.
178. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 92.
179. Craig, *Forty Years*, 264.
180. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 4. Berger defines nomos as the social world that a community creates for itself and so orders its experience. A community in return allows itself to be governed by the nomos. The nomos is vulnerable to social engineering, especially when a group is exposed to or converts to an alien worldview. The authority of the nomos or the set of meanings, created and expressed through the community's plausibility structures, are attributed to or derived from a cosmic frame of reference. In this context, the myth of emergence of the different castes from parts of Purasha provided the justification and support for the *varna-shrama dharma*.
181. The following books provide windows on the typical village architecture: Denny, *Toward the Sunrising*, 251; F. A. Coleridge, *A Brief History of Madanapalli* (Trichinopoly: Wednesday Review Press, 1911), 52; J. W. Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), 64.
182. F. Colyer Sackett, *Posnett of Medak* (London: Cargate Press, 1951), 133.
183. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 50.
184. Inderpal Grewel, *Home and Harem: Nations, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 139.
185. The ritual involved either burning one's tongue or shaving one's head or a ritual bath.
186. See Grewel, *Home and Harem*, 139.
187. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 50.
188. Grewel, *Home and Harem*.
189. Ibid., 160.
190. Ibid.
191. Agnes E. Baskerville, *Radiant Lights and Little Candles: Being a Group of Stories of Indian Characters for Children* (n.p: n.d.), 13.
192. There were also occasions when missionaries were critical of natives who traveled abroad. A. D. Rowe, *Every-Day Life in India: Illustrated from Original Photographs* (New York: American Tract Society, 1881), 322.
193. Orchard, *The Enterprise*, 151; cf. Thomas Strahan Shenston, *Teloogoo Mission Scrap Book* (Brantford, Canada: Expositor Book and Jobs Office, 1888), 47.
194. Jewett, *Life of Lyman Jewett*, 49. Given their perception of modesty as an evangelical virtue, missionaries demanded and interpreted an offering of jewelry by a Telugu woman as conversion.

195. David Downie, *From the Mill to Mission Field: An Autobiography of David Downie* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1928), 32.
196. *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* (1897): 337.
197. Grewel, *Home and Harem*.
198. Many postcolonial writers have found the life of Pandita Ramabai fascinating. Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 147–149; Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens* (Calcutta, India: STREE, 2003); Grewel, *Home and Harem*, 178–187. Grewel interprets Ramabai more as a teacher than as a pilgrim herself.
199. Ada Lee, *An Indian Priestess: The Life of Chundra Lela* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1903).
200. Flueckiger, “Wandering from ‘hills to valleys’ with the Goddess,” in Tracy Pintchman, ed., *Women’s Lives, Women’s Rituals in the Hindu Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35–54.
201. Wilber T. Elmore, *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism: A Study of the Local and Village Deities of Southern India* (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1925), 25.
202. Rauschenbusch-Clough, *While Sewing Sandals*, 119. Madigas who converted to the movement Nasriah had abandoned leather work and worked with cotton. Thereafter they are identified as dhudhakulavallu.
203. Martell, *Historical Sketch*, 95.
204. Jane Haggis, “Good Wives and Mothers’ or ‘Dedicated Workers?’ Contradictions of Domesticity in the ‘Mission of Sisterhood,’ Travancore, South India,” in *Maternities and Modernities: Colonialism and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 81.
205. *Report of the Canadian Baptist Telugu Mission* (1899), 33.
206. Ibid.
207. Ibid.
208. Ibid., 64.
209. Bromley, *They were Men Sent*, 10. The travel stories of Sadhu Sunder Singh also illustrate this culture.
210. Jacob Chamberlain, *The Man with the Wonderful Books* (New York: American Bible Society, 1917), 2.
211. Churchill, *Letters from My Home*, 158.
212. *India’s Women: The Magazine of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society* 17 (1883): 247.
213. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital*, 42.
214. Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 210.
215. Ibid.
216. Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies*, 53.
217. Ibid., 140. I Samuel 1:21–22.

#### 4 INSTITUTIONALIZING A MINISTRY: 1922–1947

1. Yaganti Chinna Rao, *Dalits' Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad, 1900–1950* (New Delhi, India: Kanishka Publishers, 2003), 87. For a history of this wing, see Mukut Behari Verma, *History of the Harijan Sevak Sangh: 1932–1968* (Delhi, India: Harijan Sevak Sangh, 1971).
2. *Ibid.*, 161.
3. Clarence H. Swavely, *One Hundred Years in the Andhra Country: A History of the India Mission of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1842–1942* (Madras, India: Diocesan Press, 1942), 30.
4. Malcolm L. Orchard and Katherine McLaurin. *The Enterprise: The Jubilee Story of the Canadian Baptist Mission in India, 1874–1924* (Toronto: The Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1925), 81.
5. *United Baptist Women's Missionary Union Report* (1929): 33.
6. David Downie, *The Lone Star: A History of the Telugu Mission of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1924), 13. Downie's list resonates with that of Clough; cf. John E. Clough, *From Darkness to Light: The Story of a Telugu* (Boston, MA: W. G. Corthell, 1882), 131–133. For a list of ten arguments in favor of British rule, see *Lutheran Woman's Work* 23:12 (December 1930): 572–573. The author also listed ten reasons why some groups in India opposed British supremacy.
7. "Hurdling Social Barrier in India is Big Jump," *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 9, 1929, 12.
8. A. D. Rowe, *Every-Day-Life in India: Illustrated from Original Photographs* (New York: American Tract Society, 1881), 306–307.
9. See Andrew Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire," in *Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter, vol. 3, of *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. W. Roger Louis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 238.
10. Porter, "Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism," in *Nineteenth Century*, ed. Louis, 200.
11. Porter, *Religions versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 324.
12. Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire," 230.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Peter L. Schmitthenner, *Telugu Resurgence: C. P. Brown and Cultural Consolidation in Nineteenth-Century South India* (Delhi, India: Manohar, 2001), 183.
15. Mary S. McLaurin, *25 Years On* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1950), 28.
16. *Ibid.*, 19.

17. *Lutheran Woman's Work* 12:3 (March 1921): 104.
18. *Lutheran Woman's Work* 13:9 (September 1922): 301–303.
19. *Ibid.*, 302.
20. *Maritime Baptist* (May 1915): 8.
21. Michael Katten, *Colonial Lists/Indian Power: Identity Formation in Nineteenth-Century Telugu Speaking India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), offers an insightful commentary on interactions of native caste groups with colonial rulers contributed to Telugu identity formation.
22. *Maritime Baptist* (December 1922): 8.
23. The wide range of attitudes of Protestant missionaries toward Gandhi at the national level can broadly be classified into three. A small group of missionaries, such as Charles F. Andrews, working among native elite groups and in institutes of higher learning regarded Gandhi very highly and even found a kind of fulfillment of their mission in Gandhi's agitation. See C. F. Andrews, "The Leader of the Non-cooperation Movement in India," *International Review of Missions*, 13 (1924): 190–204; C. F. Andrews, "Lifting the Deadweight from Missions," *Christian Century* 50:3 (January 25, 1933): 115–117. Another group of missionaries, represented by E. Stanley Jones, admired Gandhi but were critical about some of his strategies. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1948). Flora Clarke, whom I will mention shortly, can be classified with this group. A large number of missionaries, especially those working with Dalits, were critical toward Gandhi. Most of the missionaries in the Northern Circars shared this view of Gandhi.
24. *United Baptist Women's Missionary Union Report* (1931): 31.
25. Flora Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India* (Moncton, NB: Maritime Press, 1939), 676.
26. J. W. Pickett, *Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), 294.
27. *Ibid.* The regions included Krishna district in Madras Presidency, South Travancore, Chota Nagpur, the Western United Provinces, and Punjab.
28. *Ibid.*, 299.
29. J. Waskom Pickett, *Christ's Way to India's Heart: Present Day Mass Movements to Christianity* (New York: Friendship Press, 1938), 75.
30. W. J. T. Small, "The Caste Movement in Hyderabad," *National Christian Council Review* 51:2 (February 1931): 79.
31. *Ibid.*, 84.
32. F. Whittaker, "The Caste Movement towards Christianity in Northern Hyderabad," *National Christian Council Review* 53:10 (October, 1933): 517–531.
33. V. S. Azariah and Henry Whitehead, *Christ in the Indian Villages* (London: SCM Press, 1930).
34. *Lutheran Woman's Work* 22:11 (November 1929): 523. The following year reports baptisms of four Sudhras.

35. M. L. Dolbeer, *Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church: A Brief History* (Rajahmundry, India: Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1951), 60.
36. P. Raghunadha Rao, *History of Modern Andhra Pradesh* (Delhi, India: Sterling Press, 1988), 135.
37. Ibid., 123. The interest in establishing universities in the region did not surge until the mid-1970s when University of Hyderabad, Kakatiya University, and Acharya Nagurjuna University were founded.
38. Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 237. The District Collector of the British administration had handed over an Anglo-vernacular school to John C. F. Heyer upon his arrival in 1842. It became a second-grade college in 1885. The second-grade colleges offered First Arts degrees while the first-grade colleges were authorized to confer Bachelor of Arts degrees.
39. The next of the medical colleges in the region was founded in 1954, that is, after the formation of Andhra Pradesh. Four medical colleges were established in four years after 1954.
40. Oscar L. Larson, *Augustana in India* (np: nd), Augustana Archives, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, 21. Given the references to dates in this manuscript, one might safely conclude that it was written in the mid-1950s. See also Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 281.
41. *Among the Telugus* (1935): 100.
42. Lilla Stirling, *In the Vanguard: Nova Scotia Women in Mid Twentieth Century* (Windsor, Canada: Lancelet Press, 1976), 56.
43. *Among the Telugus* (1935): 101.
44. She was named after a goddess in the Dalit pantheon whose favors parents might have sought during pregnancy.
45. Lois Knowles, “Saved to Serve: Sketches of Three Bible Women,” TMs, 1, Esther Clark Wright Archives, Vaughan Memorial Library, Acadia University, Wolfville, Canada.
46. Stirling, *In the Vanguard*, 56.
47. Winnifred Eaton, “Eva Rose York Bible Training School: Memories from the Early Days,” TMs, Esther Clark Wright Archives, Vaughan Memorial Library, Acadia University, Wolfville, Canada. Permanent structures for the seminary were built and opened in the autumn of 1925.
48. “A List of Biblewomen in the Esther Clark Wright Archives,” [1950], TMs, 1, Vaughan Memorial Library, Acadia University, Wolfville, Canada. This list with brief biographical sketches might have been intended for circulation among women’s clubs in Maritime Baptist congregations. By adding the number of years of each Biblewoman, as cited in the document, to the year of graduation, one can conclude that it was written sometime around 1950.
49. *Among the Telugus* (1929): 101.
50. *Tidings* (February 1927): 3.
51. Anna Esau, *The First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions* (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 200; cf. Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 101.
52. Psalm 119:130.

53. In addition to the notes carried from their alma maters, the series of Biblical commentaries produced by Baptist missionaries would have provided the basis for the instruction. John McLaurin, *Telugu Commentary on the New Testament: Acts of Apostles*, vol. 4 (Madras, India: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1902); J. Heinrichs, *Telugu Commentary on the New Testament: Letter to the Romans*, vol. 5 (Madras, India: SPCK, 1903); William Boggs, *Telugu Commentary on the New Testament: Gospel according to St. Luke*, vol. 2 (Madras, India: SPCK, 1904); John McLaurin, *Telugu Commentary on the New Testament: Gospel according to St. John*, vol. 3 (Madras, India: SPCK, 1906); John McLaurin, *Telugu Commentary on the New Testament: The First Corinthians to Philippians*, vol. 4 (Madras, India: SPCK, 1906).
54. The Esther Vaughn Archives at Acadia University hold a box of pictures used in the Bible instruction at ERYBTS.
55. Esau, *The First Sixty Years*, 200.
56. Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 101.
57. Ann Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 56. Anne Stott, a British historian, identifies the philosophical sources that contributed to this view of woman in her essay, “A Singular Injustice towards Women: Hannah More, Evangelicalism and Female Education,” in *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900*, ed. Sue Morgan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 26.
58. John Craig, *Forty Years among the Telugus: A History of the Mission of the Baptists of Ontario and Quebec, Canada, to the Telugus, South India, 1867–1907* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1908), 179; Stirling, *In the Vanguard*, 101.
59. Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 94.
60. Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*, 58.
61. *Eva Rose York Bible and Technical Training School for Women: Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, 2000, 71.
62. *Maritime Baptist* (May 1927), 9.
63. Christina Eriksson, “My Life as a Missionary in India,” 17, TMs, Augustana Archives, Augustana College, Rock Island, IL. The verse is taken from John 12:20.
64. *Tidings* (October, 1981): 14.
65. Swavely, *One Hundred Years*, 265.
66. *The Union Baptist Theological Seminary, Ramapatnam, South India: Jubilee Memorial, 1874–1924, and Seminary Catalogue, 1924* (Cuttack, India: Mission Press, 1924), 55.
67. Clarence H. Swavely, *Biographical Record of the Pastors, Missionaries and Prominent Laymen of the United Lutheran Church Mission and the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Guntur, India: Board of Publication of the Federation of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, 1938), 136.
68. Ibid., 133.

69. Eaton, “Eva Rose York Bible Training School,” TMs, 2.
70. *Among the Telugus* (1929): 100.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Stirling, *In the Vanguard*, 56.
73. *Canadian Missionary Link* (1879): 6.
74. *United Baptist Women’s Missionary Union Report* (1944): 35.
75. *Canadian Missionary Link* (November 1879): 9.
76. Katherine S. McLaurin, *Mary Bates McLaurin* (Toronto: Women’s Baptist Foreign Missionary Society of Ontario West, 1945), 88.
77. *Union Baptist Theological Seminary*, 55.
78. Fidelia Fiske, *Recollections of Mary Lyon, with Selections from Her Instructions to the Pupils in Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary* (Boston, MA: American Tract Society, 1866), 236–239; Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 38; Dana Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Theory and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984), 96–97.
79. McLaurin, *Mary McLaurin*, 89.
80. Kancha Iliah, “Productive Labor, Consciousness and History; The Dalitbahujan Alternative,” in *Subaltern Studies IX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press 1996), 168.
81. *Among the Telugus* (1924): 51.
82. Larson, *Augustana in India*, 10.
83. Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*, 56.
84. *Ibid.*, 58.
85. Winnifred Eaton, who planned the curriculum at ERYBTS, attended Union Missionary Training School, Brooklyn, New York. Her successor Mattie Curry was an alumna of Gordon College. Christina Eriksson attended Teachers’ Training College in Minnesota. Ruth Swanson studies at St. Cloud Teachers’ College, Minnesota.
86. Larson, *Augustana in India*, 10.
87. Fiske, *Recollections of Mary Lyon*, 226–230.
88. *Eva Rose York Bible Trainings School of Women: Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, 74–75.
89. Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India*, 565.
90. McLaurin, *25 Years On*, 26.
91. A. A. Scott, *Beacon Lights: A Sketch of the Origin and the Development of Our Mission Stations in India and the Missionary Personnel* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1922), 98.
92. *Ibid.*, 28.
93. *Lutheran Woman’s Work* 22:9 (September 1929): 404.
94. Orchard and McLaurin, *The Enterprise*, 279.
95. *Among the Telugus* (1945): 75; *United Baptist Women’s Missionary Union Report* (1945): 36.

96. Chad Bauman, “Redeeming Indian ‘Christian’ Womanhood: Missionaries, Dalits, and Agency in Colonial India,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24:2 (2008): 20.
97. In fact, the school benefited from the services of other Canadian Baptist missionaries who visited and held “retreats” away from the classroom. The resident missionary staff included Laura Bain, Vivian Waldron, Winnifred Paskall, and Mattie Curry. Mattie Curry and Winnifred Paskall eventually succeeded Eaton.
98. Isaac, son of Sarah and Abraham, became a Baptist minister in Srikakulam. *Canadian Baptist Mission, 125 Year's Jubilee Celebrations of “Baptist Churches in Northern Circars” 1874–125–1999: Souvenir* (Kakinada, India: Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999), 401.
99. Probably at Leonard Theological College, a Methodist seminary in Jebalpur.
100. *Among the Telugus* (1931): 90.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid., 98.
103. “A List of Biblewomen,” TMs, 1950, 6.
104. Lorraine Coops, “Living by Faith: Maritime Baptist Single Women Missionaries,” (PhD diss. Queen’s University, Kingston, 1996), 182.
105. A group of Baptist congregations in a radius of around ten miles was considered a “field.” It is the second level in the four-tier ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Baptist denomination in India, followed by the convention and association. American Baptist missionaries imported this polity or centralized structure, that is, congregation-field-association-convention, from North America to facilitate better administration.
106. *Lutheran Woman’s Work* 22:9 (September 1929): 404.
107. Jane Haggis, “‘Good Wives and Mothers’ or ‘Dedicated Workers?’ Contradictions of Domesticity in the ‘Mission of Sisterhood,’ Travancore, South India,” in *Maternities and Modernities: Colonialism and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Kalpana Ram and Margaret Jolly (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 81.
108. “A List of Biblewomen,” TMs, 1950, 1.
109. Ibid., 2.
110. *Among the Telugus* (1948): 54.
111. The daughters of trainees at CSMBTS sent their daughters to Central Girls’ School at Rajahmundry. *Lutheran Woman’s Work* 24:2 (February 1931): 64.
112. “A List of Biblewomen,” TMs, 1950, 6.
113. Ibid.
114. Ibid.
115. *Eva Rose York Bible Training School for Women: Platinum Jubilee Souvenir*, 78.
116. Orchard and McLaurin, *The Enterprise*, 225.
117. Madigas allowed marriage of their widowed women. Tulja Ram Singh, *The Madiga: A Study in Social Structure and Change* (Lucknow,

India: Ethnographical and Folk Culture Society, 1969), 51; cf. V. Ramakrishna, *Social Reform in Andhra: 1848–1919* (New Delhi, India: Vikas Publishing House, 1983); Edgar Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. 4 (Madras, India: Government Press, 1909), 319.

118. *UBWMU Report*, 1937, 40; Mary E. Chamberlain, *Fifty Years in Foreign Fields, China, Japan, India, Arabia: A History of Five Decades of the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions of Reformed Church in America* (New York: Woman's Board of Foreign Missions Reformed Church in America, 1925), 87.

119. Leslie A. Flemming, *Women's Work for Women: Missionaries and Social Change in Asia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), 28.

120. Helen Baily, *Jeep Tracks* (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), 23; cf. Frank C. Sackett, *Out of the Miry Clay: The Story of the Hyderabad Mission to the Outcastes* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, 1924), 51.

121. Mabel E. Archibald, *Glimpses and Gleams of India and Bolivia: The Jubilee Book of Mission Bands* (Toronto: The American Baptist Publication Society for Baptist Women's Missionary Societies of Canada, 1923), 36.

122. Ibid.

123. "A List of Biblewomen," TMs, 1950, 7.

124. Ibid., 12.

125. Ibid., 4.

126. Ibid., 5.

127. Ibid., 13.

128. They were Dharmarazu Savithri, D. Khaamamma, Chandramma, B. Neelamma, K. Rajabhalamma, K. Martha, Satyavathi, A. Lakshmi Devi, and Esther Rani.

129. "A List of Biblewomen," TMs, 1950, 5.

130. Blandina, Joy, Maha Lakshmi, and Suzanne were named while one remained unnamed.

131. A telephonic conversation with Rev. Dr. Lalitha Kruparao, former principal of the ERYBTS.

132. Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India*, 671.

133. Archibald, *Glimpses and Gleams*, 108.

134. Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India*, 671.

135. *Among the Telugus* (1936): 113; cf. Daniel Orville, *Moving with the Times: The Story of Outreach from Canada into Asia, South America and Africa* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1973), 117.

136. *Among the Telugus* (1935): 113.

137. Anna S. Kugler, *Guntur Mission Hospital, Guntur, India* (Philadelphia, PA: Women's Missionary Society of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1928), 46.

138. John Craig et al., *Telugu Trophies: The Jubilee Story of Some of the Principal Telugu Converts in the Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission in India from 1874 to 1924* (Toronto: Canadian Baptist Foreign Mission Board, 1925), 74.

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*of India* (Chicago: Student Missionary Campaign Library, 1900), 210. In Telugu culture, dogs were treated as dirty.

140. Archibald, *Glimpses and Gleams*, 108.

141. *Ibid.*

142. Clarke, *Sisters: Canada and India*, 671.

143. *Among the Telugus* (1929): 101.

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146. Knowles, “Saved to Serve,” TMs, 1.

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